

Leave of Absence

Monday, August 14, 2000

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, August 14, 2000

The House met at 10.30 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to advise that I have received communication from the Member for Oropouche, Hon. Trevor Sudama, who is out of the jurisdiction on official business. He has asked to be excused from sittings of this honourable House from August 13 to 19, 2000. The leave of absence which he seeks has been granted.

ELECTIONS AND BOUNDARIES COMMISSION REPORT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I also wish to advise that on Friday, August 11, 2000 the Chairman of the Elections and Boundaries Commission, Sir Isaac Hyatali, visited me and presented me with a copy of the report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission for the year 2000 on the review of the constituencies' boundaries pursuant to section 72 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

This report headed "Year 2000 Report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission on the Review of Constituency Boundaries Pursuant to Section 72 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago" was addressed to the Hon. Basdeo Panday, Prime Minister, and to the Hon. Hector McClean, Speaker of the House of Representatives. It is my obligation, under the Constitution, to present this report to this honourable House, and I advise that sufficient copies for all Members were, in fact, delivered by the Elections and Boundaries Commission to the Parliament this morning. These will be made available, apart from which, this copy will be placed in the library for use by Members if they so wish.

In this regard, I wish to draw notice of hon. Members to the fact that in one of yesterday's newspapers there was, what appeared to be, a verbatim account of the contents of this report which was handed to me, and which nobody else in this Parliament saw on Friday and which was removed from lock and key only this morning when I came in. I am particularly saddened that some misguided person or persons obviously made available to the press a copy of this report which up to now should have been presented only to the hon. Prime Minister and to me.

EBC Report 2000
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It is discourteous in the extreme that anybody would have made this report available before it was seen by hon. Members and before it was seen, indeed, by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

So in those circumstances I ask the House to take note of this and to point out that House Standing Orders do, in fact, provide penalties for people who contravene and who publish documents.

Thank you.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Arima Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1989. [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Arima Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1990. (*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*)
3. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the National Lotteries Control Board for the year ended December 31, 1995. (*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*)
4. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the National Lotteries Control Board for the year ended December 31, 1996. (*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*)
Papers 1 to 4 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
5. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Trinidad and Tobago Free Zones Company Limited for the financial year 1999. (*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*)
6. Annual Audited Financial Statements of National Helicopter Services Limited for year ended September 30, 1999. (*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*)
Papers 5 and 6 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.
7. The Education (Local School Board) Regulations, 2000. [*The Minister of Education (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar)*]
8. Procedure with regard to the Grant of Scholarships and Training Awards. [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. R. L. Maharaj)*]
9. Guidelines for Contract Employment in Government Ministries, Departments and Statutory Authorities. (*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*)
10. Guidelines for Contract Employment in the Tobago House of Assembly. (*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*)

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**Water and Sewerage Authority
(Construction Contracts)**

78. Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin East*) asked the Minister of Public Utilities:

- (a) Would the Minister give details of all construction and/or equipment supply contracts in excess of \$1 million awarded by the Water and Sewerage Authority in the years 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 to date, including the names of the successful contractors, the type of work, the location of the work, the date of award, and the amount of each contract?
- (b) Would the Minister state whether the successful contractor was the lowest bidder in each case?
- (c) In cases where the successful contractor was not the lowest bidder, would the Minister give the reasons why the contracts were not awarded to the lowest bidder?

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Ganga Singh): Mr. Speaker, the Water and Sewerage Authority awarded 12 construction and/or equipment supply contracts over the five-year period from 1996 to 2000. The description of the works, the names of the contractors, the locations of the jobs, the dates of awards and the value of the contracts are tabulated in the Appendix which I will read into the record.

CONSTRUCTION AND/OR EQUIPMENT SUPPLY CONTRACTS AWARDED
BY WASA IN EXCESS OF \$1M FOR THE PERIOD 1996—2000

	DESCRIPTION	CONTRACTOR	JOB LOCATION	DATE OF AWARD	VALUE OF CONTRACT (TT\$)	REMARKS
1	Supply and installation of hydrological equipment for the Water Resources Agency	HSQ Technology/ Caribbean Integrated Systems Ltd/Integrand Services Company Group (Joint Venture)	WRA	29/11/96	9,892,782.00	Lowest

Oral Answers to Questions
[HON. G. SINGH]

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	DESCRIPTION	CONTRACTOR	JOB LOCATION	DATE OF AWARD	VALUE OF CONTRACT (TT\$)	REMARKS
2	Procurement of Works for the Drilling and Equipping of Wells	East Coast Drilling and Workover Services Limited	Arima No. 8	15/12/97	2,866,866.00	Lowest
		Southern Exploration and Production Company	Freeport No. 14 Freeport Todds Road Penal Cameron No. 1 Wallerfield No. 18 Wallerfield No. 19	15/12/97	5,133,343.00	Lowest
3	Rehabilitation of Las Lomas Water Treatment Plant	Hafeez Karamath & Tibury Douglas Construction Ltd. (Joint Venture)	Las Lomas	26/8/97	1,253,615.00	Lowest
4	Supply and Delivery of Leakage Control Equipment					
	Valve Box Locator, Mains Tracers, Tapping Machines	Health Consultants Limited	Throughout Trinidad and Tobago	9/4/98	1,348,162.96	Lowest
	Meters and Loggers	Water and Oilwell Services		9/4/98	1,463,340.06	Lowest

	DESCRIPTION	CONTRACTOR	JOB LOCATION	DATE OF AWARD	VALUE OF CONTRACT (TT\$)	REMARKS
5	Groundwater Assessment and Well Development Programme to obtain additional supply of 2 million gallons of water per day in Tobago for the Water and Sewerage Authority	Lennox Petroleum Services Limited	Tobago	20/9/99	1,563,800.00	second lowest bidder
6	Provision of Construction Services for the La Fillette Water Supply Project-Civil Works Construction	Super Industrial Services Limited	La Fillette	2/6/99	1,272,479.44	Lowest
7	Provision of Design & Construction Services for the Beetham Force Main	Pres-T-Con Limited	Beetham	28/7/99	9,098,320.00	Lowest
8	Design, Supply and installation of Water treatment plants for the Tobago Water Supply Project	NH International	Hillsborough	15/12/99	10,299,570.40	Lowest
		General Earth Movers/UEM Inc. Ltd.	Richmond	15/12/99	7,607,033.87	Lowest

	DESCRIPTION	CONTRACTOR	JOB LOCATION	DATE OF AWARD	VALUE OF CONTRACT (TT\$)	REMARKS
		Trinidad Oilfield Suppliers Ltd.	Courland	15/12/99	8,543,704.67	Lowest
9	Provision of Services for Remedial Works on Water wells in Trinidad and Tobago during 2000/2001	A & V Drilling	Throughout Trinidad and Tobago	6/4/00		Lowest in Trinidad and Tobago
		Caribbean Well Services		6/4/00		Four other alternate contractors were awarded contracts based on their ranking to support the lowest bidder.
		Walkerwell Limited.		6/4/00		“
		East Coast Drilling.		6/4/00		“
		Water and Oilwell Services.		6/4/00		“

	DESCRIPTION	CONTRACTOR	JOB LOCATION	DATE OF AWARD	VALUE OF CONTRACT (TT\$)	REMARKS
10	Tender for the construction and Rehabilitation of WSSRP Service Reservoirs for the North Water Project	NH International	Pepperhill Ser Reservoir	17/4/00	9,741,201.74	Lowest
11	Rehabilitation/ Reconstruction of Water Treatment Plants for the North Water Project	Hafeez Karamath	Maraval	4/6/00	9,133,315.42	Lowest
		WeldFab	Carlsen Field	4/6/00	9,100,000.00	Second Lowest
		United Engineering Services Limited	Freeport	4/6/00	7,941,150.00	Lowest
		Process Components	North Oropouche	4/6/00	12,682,396.03	Lowest
		General Earth Movers/UEM Inc. Ltd.	Hollis	4/6/00	14,296,291.15	Lowest
12	Rehabilitation and Construction of WSSRP Booster Pumping Stations-1 NWP 5104	Engineering Agencies Limited	Valsayn Booster & Valsayn Highlift	15/5/00	4,821,600.00	Lowest
		NSK Maintenance Services Limited	El Socorro Booster & El Socorro Highlift	15/5/00	3,541,278.00	Lowest

	DESCRIPTION	CONTRACTOR	JOB LOCATION	DATE OF AWARD	VALUE OF CONTRACT (TT\$)	REMARKS
		Engineering Agencies Limited	Tabaquite and Malgretoute	15/5/00	4,816,778.00	Lowest
		NSK Maintenance Services Limited	North Oropouche and Arouca	15/5/00	5,066,352.00	Lowest

10.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to question (b), in 10 of the 12 contracts awarded over the period in question, the successful contractors were the lowest bidders. The other two were awarded to the second lowest bidders.

In answer to part (c), in cases where the successful contractor was not the lowest bidder, the reasons for the award were:

- (i) Groundwater Assessment and Well Development Programme to obtain two million gallons of water per day in Tobago:

Firstly, although the experience and expertise of the lowest bidder, Southern Exploration, met the basic and general requirements, none of its partners ever planned and executed a project of this nature and type, covering both exploration and well development of the groundwater. In addition, the company's development experience was substantially weaker than that of the second lowest bidder, Lennox Petroleum Services Limited.

Secondly, price was not the only governing criterion for assessment of highest competence or capability, and the successful bidder, Lennox Petroleum Services Limited, was adjudged by the evaluation panel comprising five senior officers of WASA to be highest ranked overall to undertake this project to provide water to the Tobago public water supply system in the shortest period of time.

- (ii) Rehabilitation/Reconstruction of Water Treatment Plants for the North Water Project—Maraval, Carlsen Field, Freeport, North Oropouche and Hollis.

Five contractors were selected for this project, one for each of the areas: Maraval, Carlsen Field, Freeport, North Oropouche and Hollis. The contractors selected for Maraval, Freeport, North Oropouche and Hollis were the lowest

bidders. South-M Oilfield Supplies and Inspection Services Limited, although the lowest tenderer for the Carlsen Field area, submitted a tender of \$8,430,400.00 which was found to be almost half of the engineer's estimate. Furthermore, certain critical components of the submission were found to be underestimated by up to 100 per cent.

Additionally, South-M Oilfield Supplies and Inspection Services Limited did not post-qualify because the firm's average annual turnover of TT \$5 million did not satisfy the required TT \$18 million, and because of the firm's limited experience as well as inadequate experience of its personnel. Consequently, WeldFab, the second lowest tenderer, was awarded the contract.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, in the case of the last contract mentioned, did the lowest bidder pre-qualify?

Hon. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, based on the advice I have from the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA), it would appear so.

Mr. Imbert: Further supplemental. If the lowest bidder did pre-qualify, why was it ruled inadmissible during the evaluation process?

Hon. G. Singh: Based on the advice I have, it appeared that they underestimated based on the engineering evaluation.

Mr. Imbert: Further supplemental. Mr. Speaker, are there any other public utility projects dealing with water in the public sector that are not contained in the Minister's list, and if so, why, during the period in question?

Hon. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, the question was very specific. It was asked, would the Minister give details of all construction and/or equipment supply contracts in excess of \$1 million awarded by the Water and Sewerage Authority, and what we have presented to this House is an exhaustive list of that awarded by the Water and Sewerage Authority.

Mr. Imbert: Would the Minister then indicate whether there are contracts in the water sector that have been awarded during the period 1996—2000?

Hon. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, this is an exhaustive list provided by the Water and Sewerage Authority. That is the statutory authority charged with the responsibility for water.

Mr. Imbert: Final supplemental, Mr. Speaker. Is there any state agency, any ministry, any company or individual working for the Ministry of Public Utilities or the Government that was awarded contracts in the water sector in the period 1996—2000.

Hon. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I think my friend ought to ask the question, really, in the period 1995—2000, because it would then go into the award of the contract by the previous administration to Severn Trent, and that they had certain responsibilities and undertakings under that contract which did not fall within the purview of the Water and Sewerage Authority.

**Maritime Life (Caribbean) Limited
(Winsure)**

80. Mr. Kenneth Valley (*Diego Martin Central*) asked the Minister of Finance, Planning and Development:

Could the Minister kindly state:

- (a) whether the Winsure portfolio has been transferred to Maritime Life?
- (b) whether the Government has made any payment to Maritime Life (Caribbean) Limited in respect of the purported shortfall in the Winsure portfolio, and if so, how much was paid?
- (c) whether the Minister would lay both the preliminary and the final Report of the Independent Actuary in this House?

The Minister for Tobago Affairs and the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development (Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job): Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin Central has continued to request information and details on the transfer of the Winsure portfolio to Maritime Life (Caribbean) Limited. He has asked to be informed whether the Winsure portfolio has been transferred to Maritime Life. In addition, he wishes to ascertain whether the Government has made any payment to Maritime Life, and has also requested that a copy of the preliminary and final report of the independent actuary be laid in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to give a brief overview of the action taken by the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development in order to finalize this long outstanding issue, and be reminded that I addressed this issue in the House earlier in the year.

Cabinet agreed to the payment to Maritime Life (Caribbean) Limited for assuming the long-term portfolio of Winsure. The scheme of transfer was

confirmed by the Supervisor of Insurance in accordance with sections 84—87 of the Insurance Act on May 31, 2000. The court approved the scheme of transfer on June 16, 2000 under High Court actions Nos. 776 and 777 of 1988.

Mr. Speaker, I shall now answer the question posed by the Member for Diego Martin Central. The answer to part (a) of the question is yes, the long-term insurance business of Winsure Life and General Insurance Company Limited was transferred to Maritime Life (Caribbean) Limited as at the operative date, that is to say, July 1, 2000 as specified in the scheme of transfer.

In answer to part (b) of the question, I wish to advise that the Government has made a payment of \$68.420666 million to Maritime Life (Caribbean) Limited, of which \$59.1 million represents the shortfall in the Winsure long-term business portfolio, and the sum of \$9.320666 represents interest.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to lay in the honourable House, a copy of this preliminary and final report of the independent actuary. I wish to point out that the final report of the independent actuary was already laid in this House in January this year, in response to question (5) of the 1999—2000 session of Parliament which was also posed by the Member for Diego Martin Central.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether the Minister would confirm that the independent actuary's report was, in fact, laid in the House in January?

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Mr. Speaker, I quote again: I wish to point out that the final report of the independent actuary was already laid in this House in January this year in response to question (5) of the 1999—2000 session of Parliament which was posed by the Member for Diego Martin Central. I guess the *Hansard* records would show that.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I ask also that the Minister confirm that he will lay the preliminary report of the actuary today?

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Mr. Speaker, I have here a preliminary report of the actuary, which will be laid.

Mr. Valley: Third supplemental, Mr. Speaker; whether the Government would be prepared to send those two reports to the Public Accounts Committee, which was charged with the responsibility of looking at this payment to Maritime with respect to the Winsure portfolio?

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Mr. Speaker, I see no problem with providing the information in the documents to the Public Accounts Committee.

**Scarborough General Hospital
(Dialysis)**

81. Miss Pamela Nicholson (*Tobago West*) asked the Minister of Health:

- (a) Is the Minister aware that in 1990, six dialysis machines were donated to the Scarborough General Hospital by the Tobago Cultural Association of the US Incorporated to implement dialysis services to Tobago?
- (b) Could the Minister please inform the House whether four of these same (Scarborough) dialysis machines were loaned to the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex for implementing dialysis services in Trinidad?
- (c) Would the Minister tell this House why there is no dialysis service at the Scarborough General Hospital?
- (d) Would the Minister explain what programme he has implemented to take care of kidney patients in Tobago who are in need of dialysis services?

The Minister of Health (Dr. The Hon. Hamza Rafeeq): Mr. Speaker, in response to the first question as to whether the Minister is aware that six dialysis machines were donated to the Scarborough General Hospital in 1990, the answer is that I was not aware of that.

Since I received notice of this question, the Ministry has been trying to get information and the documents related to this donation, and so far, we have not been able to get any documentation relative to it. However, in response to part (b) as to whether four dialysis machines were loaned by the Scarborough General Hospital to the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, we have been able to find on the records that two dialysis machines were, in fact, loaned in 1992 by the Tobago House of Assembly to the then Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex Authority to implement a dialysis programme there. These two machines were used machines. Their lifespan expired after two years and they have since been replaced at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex.

In response to part (c), there has never been a chronic haemodialysis programme at the Scarborough hospital. However, the Scarborough hospital is capable of offering, and does offer, short-term peritoneal dialysis for patients with acute renal failure and chronic abdominal peritoneal dialysis is also being offered.

In relation to part (d), the Ministry of Health supports the needs of patients, both in Trinidad and in Tobago, who require haemodialysis through a medical aid fund administered by a committee at the Ministry of Health. Any kidney patient who attends a public hospital and wishes to avail himself of that service can do so by applying through the hospital social worker. Patients from the Scarborough hospital have benefited from this programme.

Mr. Speaker, haemodialysis is an extremely expensive service. At no time has this country or any developing country been able to offer haemodialysis to all the patients who need it. Certainly in Trinidad and Tobago, no government, whether PNM, NAR or the UNC has been able to offer dialysis services to all the patients in need of such services.

In Trinidad and Tobago there is a high incidence of diabetes and hypertension both of which can lead to eventual chronic renal failure. Although we do not have the exact data, the estimate is that to offer dialysis to all patients who will need it will cost the Government over \$150 million per year, and the figures may be higher. Countries all over the world have recognized that the only way to deal with this problem is through primary health care and prevention of this disease which is, to a large extent, preventable.

Mr. Speaker, this is precisely why Trinidad and Tobago has entered into a Health Sector Reform Programme with emphasis on primary health care and disease prevention and control. The Health Sector Reform Programme, therefore, is geared to make the best use of resources available for health care. In relation to Tobago, the budget allocated to the Tobago House of Assembly for health has increased from \$40.8 million in 1995, to \$62.125 million in the year 1999—2000.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.

11.00 a.m.

Miss Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, before question No. 82, I would like to ask a supplementary question on question No. 81. The Minister said he was not aware that Tobago was granted six dialysis machines, but he found out afterwards that two were used—even though they were used machines—for two years. Could he tell me what happened to the other four because there were six? Why was this service not offered in Tobago?

Dr. The Hon. H. Rafeeq: I am saying, Mr. Speaker, that I am not aware that there were six machines. What I am aware of is that there is correspondence dealing with the loan of two machines from Tobago to the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex.

Tobago Health Services

82. Miss Pamela Nicholson (*Tobago West*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Subsequent to his appointment to office, has the Minister:

- (a) trained staff to operate dialysis machines in Tobago;
- (b) trained staff to service such equipment;
- (c) provided Tobago with a blood bank service;
- (d) equipped the Scarborough hospital with a modern, efficient laboratory service?

The Minister of Health (Dr. The Hon. Hamza Rafeeq): Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes, we have trained staff to operate dialysis machines in Tobago. Six nurses working in Tobago have been trained over the last three years in haemodialysis treatment. The last two were trained in January 2000. The training programme consists of appropriate lectures and a four-week rotation through the nephrology/renal dialysis units.

The Biomedical Engineering Service, based at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, has the responsibility for servicing biomedical equipment, which includes renal dialysis equipment throughout the public hospitals in the country. There is, therefore, no need to train personnel in each hospital to service such equipment.

Tobago has a blood bank service which is carried out in a dedicated room appropriately called the Blood Donor Room. Over the past two years, four registered nurses were trained in transfusion medicine. This training is done with the collaboration of the Pan-American Health Organization and using their guidelines. Samples of the blood collected in Tobago are sent to the National Blood Transfusion Service at Port of Spain for screening for dangerous pathogens. The results are sent by fax to the Laboratory Manager in Tobago and, based on the results, the blood is separated into those units to be used for transfusion and those to be discarded. Those for transfusion are then refrigerated and kept at standard temperature for storing blood in the laboratory.

In the event of a shortage of blood, requests for additional supplies are made to the headquarters of the National Blood Transfusion Service and are considered in the context of the availability of blood at the national level. This is the same procedure that is followed by all health units that utilize blood.

The laboratory at the Scarborough hospital already has equipment to offer a wide range of biomedical, haematological and microbiological tests that are

appropriate to the needs of the people of Tobago. Most of the individual pieces of equipment are less than three years old and are housed in a purpose-designed building which ensures safety for workers and yet provides the right environment to produce accurate results. However, there are some tests which are only done in a centralized manner at the Port of Spain General Hospital. Those tests are done for Trinidad and Tobago. The samples are sent from Tobago and other institutions in Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you.

Miss Nicholson: Supplementary question. Could the Minister tell us, since all these services and training programmes have been granted and Tobago was granted six dialysis machines, why are no dialysis machines in Tobago when it is said that Tobago has a fairly high percentage of persons with kidney problems today?

Dr. The Hon. H. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, the reason that Tobago has no dialysis service of its own at this point in time is because the previous government, the NAR government of which the Member for Tobago West was a part, and the PNM government, did not provide the necessary infrastructure for training which we are now doing; did not provide the needed personnel which we are now putting in place and did not provide the needed infrastructure which we are putting down in the new Scarborough hospital, which I will address in the next question. We needed equipment and we needed a dedicated water supply for clean, safe water, again, on which we are working which they did not put down.

Miss Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, the dialysis machines were provided in 1990; the NAR government was out in 1991.

Tobago Hospital (Construction of)

83. Miss Pamela Nicholson (*Tobago West*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

- (a) Could the Minister please state when the construction of the Tobago hospital will commence?
- (b) Would the Minister please inform this House whether the new hospital will include:
 - (i) a dialysis unit;
 - (ii) an intensive-care unit;
 - (iii) MRI services;

- (iv) a blood bank; and
- (v) comprehensive laboratory services to take care of all health tests?

The Minister of Health (Dr. The Hon. Hamza Rafeeq): Mr. Speaker, the contract for the design of the new Scarborough hospital was signed in May of this year. As you may be aware, the construction of the Scarborough hospital forms part of the Health Sector Reform Programme which is being partly funded by the Inter-American Development Bank. The loan contract was signed in July 1999 and, as a precondition to disbursements, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Planning and Development and the Tobago House of Assembly was to be signed. After many negotiations and discussions, the MOU was eventually signed in December 1999. Up to then, there was no agreement on the site and size of the hospital and the services to be provided there.

The Inter-American Development Bank requested that a feasibility study be conducted to determine these issues namely: site, size and the services to be provided at the new facility. Up to then, the plan called for a 65-bed hospital with one operating theatre. There was a lot of haggling with the Tobago House of Assembly concerning the terms of reference for the feasibility study and, eventually, the consultant was hired to conduct the study.

As part of the study, wide consultations were held with all the stakeholders and a one-day workshop was held. The final recommendations of the consultant were eventually adopted by all the parties and after non-objection by the Inter-American Development Bank, the tender went out for designs of the hospital.

As a result, the contract for designs was signed in May of this year and the designs are in progress. The design is expected to be completed by October of this year. Once this is finalized, tenders will go out for construction which is expected to commence in February of 2001.

On the question as to whether the new hospital will include a dialysis unit and an intensive-care unit, the answer is yes. The recommendation is for a three-bed dialysis unit and a two-bed intensive-care unit with coronary care being provided in special beds linked to the nurses' station.

Concerning the programme of provision of MRI services, there is no recommendation to provide these services at this point in time. May I just point out that at present there is no recommendation to provide MRI services anywhere in the public service in Trinidad and Tobago. However, these are ongoing issues

and can always be dealt with in the appropriate manner. The Government will consider supporting an initiative by the private sector in providing these services in Tobago.

In relation to the blood bank, the answer is yes. The new hospital will have an appropriately designed space for blood collecting and donor screening. The testing for pathogens, however, will continue at the National Blood Transfusion Service as for all other facilities in Trinidad.

On the question of the laboratory services being provided, there will be a laboratory in the new hospital that will provide comprehensive services. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Cross Crossing Interchange Project

84. Mr. Barendra Sinanan (*San Fernando West*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Would the Minister state:

- (a) the contracted cost for the Cross Crossing Interchange Project;
- (b) whether there have been any cost overruns and if so, the amounts; and
- (c) the approximate date when the entire project will be open to vehicular traffic?

The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Works and Transport (Mr. Chandresh Sharma): Mr. Speaker, the official name of the project is the Southern Roads Development Project because its scope extends beyond the construction of the Cross Crossing Interchange. The entire project comprises two contracts. Right now, Contract 2 is being implemented. It consists of:

- dualling of 0.6 kilometres of the San Fernando Bye-Pass. This is intended to improve the flow of traffic in all directions, making it easier for commuters. As you know, there is a considerable volume of traffic either to San Fernando or Port of Spain from the deep south.
- Construction of an interchange at Cross Crossing. Again, this will alleviate the daily traffic jam that has long been a problem for commuters. It will filter the San Fernando traffic from the vehicles going to other destinations in the north and south.
- Construction of a connector road from Cross Crossing to Golconda. This will eventually link Cross Crossing to the Solomon Hochoy Highway

Oral Answers to Questions
[MR. SHARMA]

Monday, August 14, 2000

Extension. The Extension is Contract 1. Tenders closed on August 3 and same is being evaluated.

Contract 2 was awarded to Seereeram Brothers Limited after a competitive bidding process by letter dated December 11, 1997 at a cost of \$151,706,440.60. This is VAT inclusive.

There are no cost overruns to date. I will repeat that. There are no cost overruns to date and none are anticipated. However, there has been a delay caused by the incomplete correctional works on the retaining wall. In spite of this, the project is 95 per cent complete.

Major components of the project, for instance, the connector road from Cross Crossing to Golconda, are already open to vehicular traffic. The consultant, Trintoplan Limited, has advised that substantial completion of the contract will be achieved by the end of September 2000, at which time the entire project will be open to vehicular traffic and all the citizens of this country, particularly those of the South, will benefit substantially and significantly from it through savings in time and money.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): May I announce, with your leave, to this honourable House, the way the Government proposes to deal with matters today.

There is a Motion on the Second Supplemental Order Paper for an extension of time. We would want that to be heard. There are two Senate Amendments to the Dangerous Drugs (Amdt.) Bill, that is Motion No. 2. Then we propose to deal with "Bills Second Reading", Bill No. 1. We are going to complete that and then we propose to deal with the other Bill which was in progress sometime before, the Socially Displaced Persons Bill and we would like to deal then with the Tourism Development Bill, Bill No. 9. So, we first have the two Motions, then "Bills Second Reading", No. 1; Committee Stage of the Bill which was in progress; then Bill No. 9; then we have the Motion relating to education, which is Motion No. 1; then we have the Community Mediation (Amdt.) Bill, Bill No. 8 and the last one, depending on the time, for which notice was given today is Bill No. 2, the Proceeds of Crime Bill. Depending on the time, we would do that.

Agreed to.

CHILDREN (AMDT.) BILL**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT**

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Whereas on Friday, January 14, 2000, this House appointed six Members to serve with an equal number from the Senate on a Joint Select Committee which was established to consider and report on the "Children's Authority Bill, 1999";

And whereas the Joint Select Committee has not yet completed its deliberation on these bills;

And whereas the time limit for the submission of the report of that Joint Select Committee has expired;

Be it resolved that this House extend the time limit for the submission of the report of the Joint Select Committee to September 18, 2000.

Question proposed.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, the Motion speaks for itself and I do not think I can add anything to it. The contents are self-explanatory.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this House extend the time limit for the submission of the report of the Joint Select Committee to September 18, 2000.

11.15 a.m.

DANGEROUS DRUGS (AMDT.) BILL**Senate Amendments**

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That the Senate amendments to the Dangerous Drugs (Amdt.) Bill listed in the appendix be now considered.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 17(2).

Senate amendment read as follows:

“In lines six and seven delete the words ‘guilty of the offence’ and substitute the words ‘commits the offence’.”

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, the word should not have been “guilty” because the court finds a person guilty. The person commits the offence and then the court determines that the person is guilty, so I beg to move.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 19.

Senate amendment read as follows:

“Delete all the words appearing after the word ‘shall’ and substitute the words ‘apply only to the penalties prescribed for possession of dangerous drugs under this Act’.”

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, clause 19 of the Bill dealt with the question of minimum sentencing and for the court not to have discretion in relation to varying what the Parliament has decided. In the other place, it was agreed that this should be confined to the question of possession of dangerous drugs, in that, the courts should have a discretion, when it comes to possession of dangerous drugs, not to keep, if it so desires, the punishment laid down in the Act, that it could pass a lower sentence. But in respect of trafficking and other matters the courts have to keep to the minimum sentencing laid down in the Act. That is what this is about.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, may I ask that we have a division in respect of this, because of the nature of the Bill.

Question put.

*Dangerous Drugs (Amdt.) Bill**Monday, August 14, 2000*

The House voted: Ayes 29

AYES

Maharaj, Hon. R. L.

Persad-Bissessar, Hon. K.

Lasse, Dr. The Hon. V.

Griffith, Dr. The Hon. R.

Maraj, Hon. R.

Rafeeq, Dr. The Hon. H.

Assam, Hon. M.

Job, Dr. The Hon. M.

Khan, Dr. F.

Singh, Hon. G.

Nanan, Dr. The Hon. A.

Partap, Hon. H.

Mohammed, Dr. The Hon. R.

Singh, Hon. D.

Ramsaran, Hon. M.

Sharma, C.

Ali, R.

Valley, K.

Manning, P.

Imbert, C.

Narine, J.

Hart, E.

James, Mrs. E.

Joseph, M.

Sinanan, B.

Boynes, R.

Hinds, F.

Williams, E.

Nicholson, Miss P.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if for the avoidance of doubt I can ask the House to revisit clause 17(2) purely for the purpose of taking a similar division.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, just an observation; I wondered whether the change in clause 17(2) ought not to be “charged with committing the offence” rather than “commits the offence”, because as a layperson I have a difficulty in seeing the difference between “commits the offence” and “guilty of the offence”. I think what we really want to say is “charged with committing the offence”.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Perhaps if I read this section it might assist us. Under the section which we passed it reads:

“Where a company commits an offence under this Act any officer director or agent of the company who directed, authorised, assented to or acquiesced in or participated in the commission of the offence is a party to and guilty of the offence and is liable on conviction to punishment provided for the offence whether or not the company had been prosecuted or convicted.”

So it would now read, if we agree with this amendment:

“Where a company commits an offence under this Act any officer director or agent of the company who directed, authorised, assented to or acquiesced in or participated in the commission of the offence is a party to and commits the offence and is liable on conviction to the punishment provided for the offence whether or not the company had been prosecuted or convicted.”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, if there is no objection to revisiting this clause we will revisit it and have a division on it.

Question put.

The House voted: Ayes 29

AYES

Maharaj, Hon. R. L.

Persad-Bissessar, Hon. K.

Dangerous Drugs (Amdt.) Bill

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Lasse, Dr. The Hon. V.
Griffith, Dr. The Hon. R.
Maraj, Hon. R.
Rafeeq, Dr. The Hon. H.
Assam, Hon. M.
Job, Dr. The Hon. M.
Khan, Dr. F.
Singh, Hon. G.
Nanan, Dr. The Hon. A.
Partap, Hon. H.
Mohammed, Dr. The Hon. R.
Singh, Hon. D.
Ramsaran, Hon. M.
Sharma, C.
Ali, R.
Valley, K.
Manning, P.
Imbert, C.
Narine, J.
Hart, E.
James, Mrs. E.
Joseph, M.
Sinanan, B.
Boynes, R.
Hinds, F.
Williams, E.
Nicholson, Miss P.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE (AMDT.) BILL

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [June 5, 2000]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question Proposed.

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, when this matter had been adjourned, I checked the *Hansard* and the Member for San Fernando East had spoken. I do not know, but I was under the impression that I had not completed my submission, but I had completed my submission and then the Member for San Fernando East spoke.

Mr. Speaker: The Member for San Fernando East has indeed indicated that he had completed his contribution.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: As a matter of fact, the hon. Member for San Fernando East had spoken and then the hon. Prime Minister spoke and the matter was adjourned, so I think it is depending on what the Opposition wants to do.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the debate on the second reading of the following Bill which was in progress when the House was adjourned on Monday June 5, 2000, would now be resumed.

Mr. Martin Joseph (St. Ann's East): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate on the Representation of the People (Amdt.) Bill.

I think in participating in this debate, it is necessary to remind Members of this honourable House where we were the last time the debate was adjourned and how we have gotten to the point where we are resuming this debate this morning.

You would recall, Mr. Speaker, that the debate was adjourned on Monday June 5, 2000, based on the intervention of the Leader of the Opposition and Member for San Fernando East, since we were debating amendments to the Representation of the People Act based on what the Attorney General, the mover of the legislation, indicated was based on recommendations made by the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC).

The hon. Attorney General indicated to this House that those recommendations were submitted to his office on May 18, 1998, that the amendments were circulated some 10 days prior to the Monday meeting and that

this was a special session that was being held to debate these amendments. We were concerned about the haste with which the legislation was being brought to the House, but more importantly we were concerned about the length of time that the recommendations were before the hon. Attorney General—May 18, 1998.

Despite the fact that he had indicated to this House that the recommendations were the EBC's and that the legislation reflected those recommendations, we were still suspicious. We were concerned and we indicated our concerns which stemmed from the experience we have had with respect to how the Government had treated in the past with the reports and/or recommendations made by the EBC.

Again, with the intervention of the hon. Prime Minister, the Member for Couva North, the debate was adjourned so that we could have held discussions with the Elections and Boundaries Commission. Those discussions were held with the EBC, and it was necessary that we also held discussion with our party, because we are elected representatives from a political organization that has a history of 40-something years in this country, a structured organization. It was necessary, based on those discussions held with the EBC, that the information from those discussions be discussed with our political organization, both at the general council level and at the central executive level.

I think it is important to bring this information to this honourable House, so that we can understand that we in the People's National Movement—those of us here who represent the PNM come from an organized structure, that there are processes that must be followed in order to make sure [*Desk thumping*] that the views of the people are properly articulated. I felt it was necessary to bring us up to date.

11.30 a.m.

Let me make a comment lest I forget, and I think that those on our side—and I am sure I speak on behalf of those on our side—felt pleased today when you laid the report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission, Mr. Speaker. It was received on Friday, August 11, 2000 and laid in this honourable House today, Monday, August 14, 2000.

It was instructive that you said there were only two copies, according to the Constitution one was made for you, and the other one for the Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and that you locked yours up and only brought it to this honourable House this morning, yet at the same time, the

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[MR. JOSEPH]

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contents were made public, and as you indicated, yours was properly under lock and key. So one could only assume...

Mr. Speaker: For the avoidance—unless it be reported that I have suggested that anything was leaked, I wish to advise that the EBC itself was in control of that report. I know that I got one and the relevant law says that one must go to another place. To me, it does not follow that if I did not leak it that it came from another place. There were two other sources, that is all I am pointing out, so I think one has to be careful because things could appear on paper that could give a certain effect. So for the avoidance of doubt, let us not inject that I suggested that it was leaked from one quarter and not from the other.

Mr. Manning: *[Inaudible]*

Mr. Speaker: Indeed, and there were two other sources.

Mr. M. Joseph: Mr. Speaker, let me add that one source had it for a long time before it was submitted to yourself and the other person.

You will recall in most of my contributions I have made in this honourable House dealing with the EBC, I have been on record saying that mechanisms need to be put in place so that reports of the Elections and Boundaries Commission come to us as quickly as possible. I had made reference in the past to the length of time that the Government had kept reports of the EBC and as a result it raised some concerns about the whole *modus operandi* of the Government.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall that there were a couple of clauses with which we had some serious concerns. I propose to treat with those clauses, get them out of the way and deal with the other clauses. The first area in which we had some concerns was one which the Attorney General was not in a position to explain specifically what was intended with respect to these suggested amendments. The first dealt with the question of “registration record” and you will recall that the proposed amendment stated the Act is amended by deleting the words “registration record card” and “registration record cards” wherever they occur and substituting the words “registration record” and “registration records” respectively. We were concerned with the meaning of that because we were hearing that the Elections and Boundaries Commission was not managing to computerize its records and as a result is not talking about electronic data *et cetera*.

We have been advised by the EBC that the intention of removing the records in the binder was referring to the future intention as it relates to the electronic data and as a result, the amendment was designed to ensure that at some future date the electronic record would be used and the method and process currently used will continue to be used. So it is important that when we come to deal with some of the specifics in terms as it is written in the legislation, that will be addressed.

The other area with which we had some concerns was with clauses 8 and 9 which dealt with the burden of proof and we got the impression that the burden of proof was being shifted away from the Elections and Boundaries Commission to the individual to provide birth certificate, accompanying affidavit, marriage certificate, deed poll and other such information that was necessary to identify that they were *bona fide* electors. The EBC has assured us that that shift of the burden of proof that currently obtains still obtains. So again, we would have to ensure that the wording of the amendment reflects that.

The third area of concern was the question of the electoral registration, and that created some of the major areas of concern. As it exists now, when an election is called, the Elections and Boundaries Commission is required to establish registration offices so that during the period of registration—it depends on when the President proclaims that a period of registration ought to take place just prior to the conduct of the polls—the EBC is required to establish registration offices in each electoral district. If it is a local government election you are talking about 124 temporary registration offices; if it is a general election it varies. What they are asking here in terms of the amendment, is to allow them not to have to establish 124 temporary registration offices and to allow them to continue to have registration offices as now exists. For example, you have registration offices that cover a certain number of constituencies. You have 14 registration offices that cover the whole of Trinidad and Tobago and if you have to register you go to any one of those registration offices to do so. What they are asking is that they allow that to happen even when an election is called.

We had some confusion whether or not it meant that somebody working in San Fernando could register there if he lives in Diego Martin, so they have cleared up that ambiguity. The intention really is to avoid having, by law, to establish registration offices and it makes sense. I will give a recent example which we had with the local government elections where they had to establish

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these temporary registration offices and when people go to access the services provided, the people who were manning those offices could not help. They had no equipment to take photographs or what have you, and they were unable to provide adequate information. We have had that experience where there were these temporary registration offices and when you go there they give the electorate and members of the constituency misinformation. So we could see the usefulness of this amendment in terms of the electoral registration, but again it is necessary for us when we are looking, especially at committee stage, to make sure that the wording of the legislation reflects this.

This brings me to a point which was made earlier on. When the Elections and Boundaries Commission submitted these recommendations, they were submitted directly to the Government and they took them. I guess they would have interpreted them by liaising with the EBC and then they drafted the legislation to reflect the recommendations of the EBC and I still want to emphasize this point. I still believe that any report or any recommendations coming from the EBC ought to come to Parliament so that the Parliament can see it. I know it is the Government's policy to draft the legislation so that we can see it reflects the recommendations of the EBC. If the EBC has to continue to be an independent institution, it has to operate and it operates according to the law, but we believe that in its interest, in its integrity that whatever comes from the EBC, ought to come to this Parliament which would be in a position—like in this particular instance, we would have saved so much time. Because of the Government's behaviour and action, we were suspicious, but more importantly, unfortunately, and this is not intended to cast any aspersions on the competency and the integrity of the Attorney General, but some of the interpretations as reflected in the clauses to be amended left too much ambiguity and uncertainty as they relate to what was intended and we could avoid that. Those were what we could call the contentious clauses for which we had some concerns. We did not dispute the intention of increasing the amount of moneys associated with the conduct of the elections. I think it went from \$5,000 to \$50,000 and we did not see any problems with the fines associated with that.

Mr. Speaker, there is another area. Clause 7 is amended to ensure that it is mandatory for the returning officers to be exposed to training. As it is now, other persons associated with the conduct of elections—presiding officers, poll clerks and so forth are exposed to training—but returning officers are now required to be trained in order for them to take up the responsibility. I want to say something on

that training because as you know, the returning officers oversee the conduct of the elections in the particular constituency and we have had experiences where each returning officer interprets his or her responsibility differently. Let me give you an example.

We have had returning officers who have indicated that nomination fees must be by certified cheque or money order and then you have had returning officers who say they want cash and there are times when we have to interface with the Elections and Boundaries Commission to find out what it is. Especially a political organization like ours where we contest every election and in every electoral district we have persons contesting. That is a sizeable amount, and as a result, it is a sizeable amount of money to be submitted and there is inconsistency at that level, which is just an example of returning officers who exercise their authority differently.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure you must have had experience as a candidate in elections, where you can visit polling stations to look at the operations of the poll and there are presiding officers who tell you that you cannot enter even though you present the documents to show that you are a candidate. They tell you that you cannot enter and you have to call the returning officer to complain that in polling station so-and-so, there is a presiding officer who is telling you that you cannot enter. Then you also have some presiding officers who will allow you to enter the polling station and tell you that you have two minutes, but the law allows for a certain amount of time. What is even worse is that in some instances there are presiding officers—because you know that each candidate has his agent looking after the interest of the candidate in the polling station—who behave as if they are doing the polling agents a favour.

11.45 a.m.

Some of them push the polling agents in the corner of the polling station where they cannot even observe what is taking place, but the law allows for polling agents and for them to be so placed in the polling stations where they can observe everything that is taking place. I am not criticizing the Elections and Boundaries Commission, let me be clear, because somebody on the other side will jump up and say we are paranoid, that we are losing already and criticizing the EBC. No such thing, Mr. Speaker. We need to ensure that our elections are conducted in a fair manner.

Mr. Speaker, at the last election there were some 1,622 polling stations, which means that we are talking about 1,622 presiding officers, because every polling

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station has a presiding officer. It is quite possible that there can be persons who are not properly trained in the discharge of their duties. Some of them are overzealous too in how they discharge their responsibilities.

We want to ensure that the training provided for personnel in the conduct of elections must be such that there must be some consistency in the manner in which they discharge their responsibilities. This brings us back now to the question of the kind of funding that the EBC gets in order for it to retain the most competent people. We know where that funding comes from. It comes from the Government, so, the extent to which funding is provided so that people can be properly trained, Mr. Speaker, in the discharge of their responsibilities is important.

These people must be trained. They must be competent, and they must pass some sort of assessment testing, but it makes no sense putting all this in law and at the same time, the EBC is starved of the appropriate funds to ensure that they can attract the most competent personnel as it relates to the conduct of the elections.

Mr. Speaker, there is also the issue of an initiative. I must comment on it. There is an initiative that is now taking place jointly between the Attorney General's office and the Ministry of Social and Community Development that deals with the question of delayed registration of births. I must indicate that we are concerned. I understand what the Attorney General is claiming as the intention of this particular initiative.

There are some persons who thought that the initiative would be confined to persons under 18 years of age. Of course, those are persons who do not have birth certificates, and so forth. We know that the birth certificate is a major requirement for registration. We are concerned, Mr. Speaker, as I said, because we thought that this would have been confined to persons under 18 years of age. Lo and behold, that is not the case. All persons are entitled to access this programme.

We wish to suggest, in the avoidance of doubt—I was talking off the record to the learned Attorney General and he was asking, “What would you suggest?” We wanted to officially suggest that the initiative be confined to persons 17 years and less. After the conduct of elections, they could reopen the process to everybody. I will tell them why. It is unfortunate. They do not seem to understand that.

There is a certain amount of disquiet among citizens in Trinidad and Tobago with respect to some of the moves the Government is making. That is through no fault of the people. It is the fault of Government. I will tell them why. When they

conduct their affairs in a way in which the population does not have confidence in what they are doing, Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate. They say perception is as good as real. People believe that there is something behind some of these initiatives, and I think it is most unfortunate. *[Desk thumping]*

For the avoidance of doubt, I would suggest that the exercise be confined to persons under 18 years of age who will not then be able to use this birth certificate to go to register. In that way, the population will have absolutely no doubt in their minds as to the intention. *[Desk thumping]* Mr. Speaker, of course there are persons who are 16 years old who can say they are 18 years old.

People are asking, why now? I think we need to be conscious of that and we need to address it in a responsible manner to maintain the integrity of the process. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, it is nothing about paranoia.

I just want to conclude by saying again that here we have a situation where the EBC submitted a report on Friday. I think it must be complimented. Again, it shows what we can accomplish if we put processes and systems in place that will allow our institutions, in the eyes of the population, to be seen to be able to discharge their responsibilities in the way in which they are intended. In that same light, I am suggesting to the hon. Attorney General that the initiative involving his ministry and the Ministry of Social and Community Development, because of the concerns raised by members of the population, be put on hold until after the elections.

I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin East*): Mr. Speaker, we are debating a very serious bit of legislation today. The Government seems to think this is trivial legislation, but with the laying of the 2000 Report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission on the Review of Constituency Boundaries, nothing stands in the way of the Government calling an election. In fact, after this legislation is passed this week, and I guess it goes to the Senate next week, we could very well have a situation of the Prime Minister coming into this Parliament before the end of month and announcing the next general election.

We must take note of the effect of the changes. On the last occasion, we made the point that we had concerns about the intention to allow registration outside the electoral district, and we have been told that the intention is that registration of voters will take place at the district offices. This has been a practice that has been in place prior to this amendment today, and it is my understanding that there will

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be drafted, a form of words to deal with the whole question of confirming this, or we will hear from the Attorney General what they intend to do about that.

The point is, Mr. Speaker, when we read in the newspaper that 10,000 Guyanese are now registered to vote in Trinidad and Tobago, I wonder how this occurred since the last election. I wonder how this occurred. Is this a normal process of migration? Is this a normal process of movement within Caribbean territories, or is it unusual that with the advent of the UNC Government in 1995, we have had 10,000 persons coming from another country—a country where members of our Government, such as the Member for Caroni East and the Member for Couva North are fond of going, vacationing. It is my understanding that the Prime Minister and the Member for Caroni East are fond of taking vacations in Guyana. *[Laughter]* Of course, he can deny this. He can get up and say this is not true.

I have to wonder why 10,000 Guyanese citizens found it necessary, or thought it proper to migrate to Trinidad and Tobago since 1995 with the advent of the Panday Government and are now eligible to vote in Trinidad and Tobago. It would be interesting to find out where these persons have settled. Have they settled in St. Joseph? Have they settled in Tunapuna? Have they settled in San Fernando West? Have they settled in Toco/Manzanilla? Have they settled in Barataria? Have they settled in Mayaro? It would be very interesting to learn where these people have settled, as well as others who have come to Trinidad and Tobago over the last five years since the advent of the Panday Government.

Mr. Assam: Diego Martin East!

Mr. C. Imbert: I wish to know, does the Government have any information on this? Has the Government been encouraging people to squat along the East-West Corridor? You see, one of the policies of the UNC administration is to encourage squatting along the Bus Route in the East-West Corridor. They do not build houses. They believe in this land settlement and land distribution business. They encourage—especially the Member for St. Augustine—people to squat. Then, they get security of tenure, they can vote, and if one drives along the Bus Route—I know you have a Bus Route pass like me, Mr. Speaker, so you can do this—you will see the explosion in squatting along the Bus Route, especially in areas such as Bangladesh, I believe it is called, in the constituency of St. Joseph, next to the Water and Sewerage Authority headquarters.

I wonder how many of the persons in that area, and in similar areas, Mr. Speaker, are persons who have come into Trinidad and Tobago within the last

four to five years and are now registered to vote. What this Government, I am certain, is going to do—there are no significant boundary changes. In fact, one of my colleagues was commenting that even the drafters of this report do not seem to wish to see the return of the Member for Arima *[Laughter]* because the effect is an increase in the PNM majority in Arima! *[Desk thumping]* That is the only significant effect of this report.

They moved a polling station from Port of Spain North to Laventille. It does not really make a difference. We got 11,000 votes in Port of Spain North in 1995 and 11,000 in Laventille. If they exchange 200 from one to the other, it is of no significance; we still get 11,000 or thereabouts in Laventille and in Port of Spain North.

What is intriguing is that three polling divisions have been jettisoned from Arima and sent to Caroni East, along with a number of UNC voters. *[Laughter]* A number of PNM voters have been lifted out of Arouca and sent into Arima. All I would say is thank you, EBC, and goodbye, Member for Arima. *[Laughter]* The soon to be departed Member for Arima. May his soul rest in peace. *[Desk thumping]* *[Laughter]*

12.00 noon

More important, Mr. Speaker, we need to know from where all these immigrants have come, where they are located and why and when they came. Were they encouraged to squat on boundaries of marginal seats? I believe so. This is my opinion. I do believe so. I do believe that the ruling party has done this, that it has created these squatter settlements in the St. Joseph/Barataria/Tunapuna areas deliberately, in an effort to load up these constituencies with voters who may be sympathetic to the ruling party. Definitely, that is something we need to look at and we need to challenge any person who has mysteriously moved into these areas. Because once this election is fair and square, there is no way that those on the other side will see government in this country again, and by saying fair and square, I am not casting any aspersions on the Elections and Boundaries Commission.

You see, Mr. Speaker, under the law, once a person has resided in an electoral area for more than two months, a person who is eligible to vote, a Commonwealth citizen for example, is qualified to be registered in that district to be eligible to vote in that particular constituency. So, it is nothing illegal taking place here, unless these people are being brought by boatload up the Caroni River. I understand there is quite a trade that goes on after dark, up the Oropouche Lagoon

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and so forth. It is a fact and some come from Toronto and New York, I understand as well, by plane.

We really have to wonder because we had a situation, a threat to the democratic system in this country—it was reported in the newspapers where an approach was made to a sitting Member of Parliament, the Member for Tunapuna, where, once again—and I wish to congratulate my colleague. [*Desk thumping*] Not for sale, Mr. Speaker. All for sale gone already. [*Desk thumping*] The garage sale was a long time ago; it was four years ago.

Mr. Manning: We sell out the garage.

Mr. C. Imbert: The garage is gone. We have to wonder. There is a report where the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago personally sought a meeting to interview an Opposition Member of Parliament for “ah wuk” and it is alleged that he said, “Make yourself busy, busy. Run all about. Work. Be visible. Get the nomination and when the time is right, I will tell you when to come over.” Like some sort of Shakespearean drama, Mr. Speaker, when I was hearing this account of this story. We have to wonder. It is highly irregular. It is unusual. I have never heard of this. The Prime Minister himself—one would think he would send an emissary; send an agent or somebody to make this approach.

Mr. Hinds: At least.

Mr. C. Imbert: But he comes himself.

So that, Mr. Speaker, one of the difficulties I have with this upcoming election is: From where have all these voters come? In my constituency, in 1991, I had 19,000 electors. In 1995, I had 20,000. All of a sudden, I have 24,000. I mean, the population is growing at a rapid rate. From 1991—1995, it grew by 5 per cent in my constituency but from 1995 to now, it has grown by 20 per cent. What is happening?

Mr. Partap: Are you scared?

Mr. C. Imbert: No. No. Just more votes for the PNM in my area. I am not concerned about that. But you see, we really have to wonder, Mr. Speaker, when one goes out into the field, there are a number of voters on the list—this happens all the time—who cannot be accounted for. They are not there; they have migrated; they have died; they have moved out of the area and so forth. We are finding this. I am certainly discovering this and I do not know how widespread this is throughout the country, but it is a serious matter.

Another serious matter that I have raised and which I will raise again is the whole question of identification cards because we had a situation, for the first time in the 1990s, where identification cards expired. Prior to that, ID cards did not expire but in the 1985/1986 period, ID cards were issued with a 10-year life so that in 1996, 1997, 1998 and so on, ID cards began to expire in the hundreds of thousands and the EBC has conceded, at least when I asked the question on the last occasion, that there were in excess of 100,000 persons whose cards had expired and who had not yet received new identification cards. As we go into the election season, I would call on the administration to give the commission the necessary resources to deal with that because it is a question of human and physical resources.

I remember being told that an ID card was not like a driver's permit. Well, I do not understand that. If you have an ID card and you went to renew it, it should not be a lengthy process. Of course, someone will need to check to see whether you still reside in the electoral district, but we are not talking about new ID cards here, we are talking about renewal of existing ID cards. There are situations where persons in my constituency have been waiting for more than three to six months to receive their new ID cards. I understand in some constituencies people have been waiting for more than one year to receive renewed ID cards so that it is a question of resources.

Whenever this issue is raised with the Prime Minister, he is very flippant about the whole thing, but this affects everybody. It does not just affect PNM voters, it affects every single person in Trinidad and Tobago who wishes to exercise his or her franchise.

I make an appeal to the Government again, and to the Prime Minister in particular, to give to the Elections and Boundaries Commission the funds, equipment, offices and resources that it requires to issue ID cards to carry out its mandate.

You see, they could spend \$1,000 million on an airport; they could spend \$250 million paving roads that should really cost \$100 million; they could spend \$300 a tonne on asphalt when the real price is \$150; they could spend \$300 million on schools that started off at \$100 million. There are so many examples that one can give. They could spend \$100 million on Miss Universe. But could they give the Elections and Boundaries Commission \$1 million, \$2 million or \$3 million for something as important as an election?

This whole thing talks about representation of the people. When I walk around my constituency and I look at its total neglect over the last five years—absolute

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abandonment of my constituency by this vindictive UNC administration over the last five years. They come now, two months before a general election, promising all kinds of things—the moon, the sun, the stars, gold—you name it. They have not done anything for five years—fixed no road; cleaned no drain; dredged no river; fixed no leak. Nothing, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: We are still on the Bill.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes. Representation of the people. I am a representative of the people.

Mr. Speaker: Yes. I know it is representation of the people, but it has to bear some relevance to this. Please.

Mr. C. Imbert: We are talking about voting, why people would exercise their vote, why they would exercise their franchise, and why they are going to lose the next general election and why we on this side have to be careful because you see they could “tief” this election and the only way there will be victory is if the election is fair and square. The reason why I say the people will reject the UNC is because of the vindictiveness, the abandonment and neglect of constituencies throughout Trinidad and Tobago. It is all over the place even in their own constituencies; absolute abandonment and neglect, Mr. Speaker.

You see, this is why this debate today is not trivial. This is why I cannot agree with the Attorney General in his haste to just push this legislation through. It is a big joke. Just vote; the ayes have it and so forth. I am an elected representative and we are talking about the Representation of the People Act. How can I represent my people with these political criminals in office? How?

When I walk through my constituency looking for votes, when I go there asking the people for their mandate, for their franchise and their support, when I ask persons as a representative of the people under the Representation of the People Act to vote for me and my party, I have to tell them why. The reason is: Would you look at what these people have done with the billions of dollars that have flown through their hands and nothing has come for the people who reside in my constituency? It bothers me. [*Desk thumping*]

It bothers me when I look at a particular project that we were doing in 1994 and 1995; upgrading infrastructure and creating access for little people in the Long Circular area. We had managed to do about a mile of this access road and there was about a quarter mile left to be done and it is in the same condition. When I looked at it just this weekend, I looked at where we had reached in 1995;

they have not moved an inch. They have not increased or improved the infrastructure in that area by one inch, not an inch. It is amazing.

Mr. Speaker: What the Member is saying may be very interesting for a political platform, but I have difficulty in relating it to any one of the clauses of the Bill that we are discussing. Could I ask you, please, to deal with the Bill?

Mr. C. Imbert: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, but when they could pave a road for a man to have a wedding for his daughter [*Desk thumping*] and they would not pave a road in Diego Martin. I mean, it bothers me, Mr. Speaker.

12.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I recognize that five years from the date on which we came here is not too far off and there may be anxiety on the part of some to put in some last words, but I ask you please, let us now focus a little more on what is before us please.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you Mr. Speaker, I just cannot take it, but I will return to the clauses in the Bill. [*Crosstalk*] Oh, yes, Mr. Speaker.

What I would also say is that many of the provisions in this amendment that have been recommended by the commission are long overdue. The penalties, the financial limits and so forth date back many decades. The concept of candidates spending \$5,000 and so forth dates back many decades, and certainly there is need for reform in this area.

I have a query for the Attorney General. I know that he is in a very good frame of mind: he has had a very restful week; he drives on a very good road to his house—and I would ask him a question—and he has been named as a candidate. I know that he is not uptight and upset like some of the other Members on the other side, like the Member for St. Joseph, Member for St. Augustine and Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. I know that he is not jumpy. But I have a question.

When one looks at the Third Schedule—[*Crosstalk*]—I have a question for the Attorney General. In the first clause in the Third Schedule it says:

“There shall be one electoral vehicle for every six hundred electors in each electoral district.”

Then in the second clause it says:

“There shall be one electoral vehicle for every five hundred electors in an electoral district...”

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Is it that we use larger vehicles in a general election than in a local election? I cannot see the logic in that. I would think that it is a question of mobility, access and so forth. It is the same pool of voters; the same voters list and the same number of electors *et cetera*. I think it should be consistent. I do not see the point: 600 electors for a general election, one car; 500 electors for a local election, one car. I do not see the logic, so maybe that is just an administrative glitch that the Attorney General could deal with.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that I have set the tone for this debate, and I hope that I have raised certain issues that the Government would respond to in a meaningful manner, rather than just trying to push this under the table. I also would hope that the Prime Minister would not keep us waiting too long.

As I said, the year 2000 Report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission is here; we are debating the amendment to the Representation of the People Act, so within the next week or two there is nothing to stop him from calling the election. Except his own internal polls which show that the UNC is trailing badly. But I would ask the Prime Minister, come with it.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kenneth Valley (*Diego Martin Central*): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a small contribution on this matter.

As stated by my colleague the Member of Parliament for St. Ann's East, on the last occasion there were certain issues raised which could not have been answered by the other side, and we had discussion with the Elections and Boundaries Commission and the officers there have clarified some of the matters.

I have noted the amendment proposed by the Government with respect to clause 3 which is acceptable to us, in that, they are now proposing a definition of registration record to include clearly the fact that the registration record card would remain in the unit binder and, therefore, would be available for scrutiny at any time.

Mr. Speaker, clause 8, as one sees, places the burden or the onus as said in the legislation, of proving the requirements set out in subsection (1) on the person seeking to qualify as an elector. Quite simply, if one wants to be registered now and one claims that he is a national he has first of all to provide a birth certificate.

Mr. Speaker, one would recall that this debate started I think on June 5. At that time, no one in this House or, perhaps, even in the national community, heard anything about late registration of births. But lo and behold, the EBC decided that

they would place the onus on the proposed elector to indicate that, in fact, he is a national and suddenly like a “thief in the night” we hear about late registration of births.

Now, let us understand what is happening. The first time any of us in this Parliament knew about late registration of births was when we got, I think it was on June or July 28, an invitation on our desks to come to some function that the Attorney General was having to launch the late registration of births. So he is having a function to launch the late registration of births, and most of us initially paid it no mind. What kind of free function is he having again? Then it dawned on us, why is this happening? What standard of proof, of evidence, could an individual age 40 provide to the people to prove that, in fact, he is a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago? He is now 40 years old and is coming to say “Listen, my mother and father forget to register me,” 40 years afterwards. There are some 10,000 persons to be so registered.

Mr. Speaker, the Attorney General and the Minister of Social and Community Development can say what they want, I believe it is “skull”! [*Desk thumping*] I have just looked at the legislation with respect to this matter and the Act is clear. It says here in section 19(2):

“After the expiration of 12 months next after the birth of any child, that birth shall not be registered except with the written authority of the Registrar General for registering the same and except in accordance with the prescribed rules and the fact of such authority having been given shall be entered in the register.”

So the Act first of all sets out a 42-day period for the registration of births. If you have a child it must be registered within 42 days, failing that you have a three-month period under certain conditions, the registrar can get to you and so forth to have the child registered. If that is not done within the three-month period, it is saying, “Well, listen after 12 months you know you are in trouble.”

One would think that if the Government wants to give some type of amnesty—because that is what it is, you are going even beyond the 12 months, you are going years and, therefore, it would appear—with this section it gives the Registrar General the authority to register the birth outside of the 12-month period, so they would claim that they do not have to come to the Parliament. But any government having worth and honest respect for the Parliament would bring the matter to Parliament and say, “Listen, this is the situation,” that is only if it is above board. If something is above board you can come to Parliament and say this

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is the situation and, therefore, we want to give an amnesty and we want to pass the required legislation so as to allow for this.

That does not happen; this Government like a “thief in the night”, comes a Friday evening, and laughing all the way—the cynicism! They invite you to a function and go and do their “skull”, but I would want to tell them something: they can jump high, they can jump low, they have lost the next election. It does not matter what they do, it is not 10,000 they have to look for; they have to look for 100,000. That is what they have got to do—[*Crosstalk*]
—10,000 would not help you; they know that. If they did not know that they would not be running hither and thither to buy members for their party. Their party is a dying party!
[*Desk thumping*]

Let me speak to you, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister reminds me of Lucifer. What he is doing is no different to what Judas did to Jesus in the garden: I will give you all of this; I will give you jobs with this. It is the same thing Lucifer did to Jesus in the garden. That shows the orientation of that Government; it is clear!
[*Desk thumping*] Panicking?

Mr. Speaker, understand what is happening—[*Crosstalk*]
—nervous? Mr. Speaker, I would advise this Government—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Mr. K. Valley: More importantly, Mr. Speaker, I want through this Parliament to send a message to the Registrar General of births and deaths and ask him to be extremely careful with that power given to him by this Act 41:01. [Interruption] It is a her, well, the Registrar General could be man or woman. When we talk about man here we use it in the general sense, male or female, [Laughter] but if she is a lady let me send it to the honourable lady to be extremely careful and watch this Government. Ensure that the information—because that is a question I am going to file, the Government would have to tell me what are the guidelines. What information are you going to get? I want them to tell me what information they are going to accept from this 40-year-old or even from the 22-year-old to prove that. In fact, whether it is an affidavit, tell me.

Do you understand, Mr. Speaker? When they could get this birth certificate then they could run to the Elections and Boundaries Commission. The EBC is saying that the onus is now on the individual to prove that he is a national. So they say, “Man, no problem, we go give allyuh birth certificates!” They found a way to give them birth certificates... [Word expunged] [Laughter]

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that you want to withdraw that. It is expunged.

Mr. K. Valley: That is the effect they are having on me, Mr. Speaker, but understand what is happening.

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Mr. K. Valley: Understand exactly what is happening. So there is this requirement by the Elections and Boundaries Commission under clause 8 of the amendment, and let us be clear. I think the EBC has done an excellent job with this legislation. It appears, Mr. Speaker, that they saw what the Government was attempting to do and they attempted to plug every loophole. I want to say here that my faith and the confidence that we in the PNM have in the EBC have been strengthened by this legislation.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting is suspended for lunch until 1.45 p.m.

12.31 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.45 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. K. Valley: When we took the lunch break I was at the point of asking the Registrar General to be mindful of her functions under the legislation and to be extremely serious in her tasks. Under our system of government, in the final analysis, the public officials are held accountable, governments may come, governments may go, but the public officials have a responsibility to ensure due care and diligence in matters, and that responsibility must rank above any relationship one may have with any government or governmental officials. We expect a high level of integrity among our public officials.

I make the point also that our leaders in society must give an opinion on this matter. In the height of an election season to have this type of camouflage, because this is what it is. The Government had five years, if it were so concerned about persons who were not registered within the time limits of the law, it had five years in which to do that. It had absolutely no reason whatever, to wait until the eleventh hour to do so and we can only see it in one way.

Mr. Speaker, as I make this call to the Registrar General, I have to make a similar call to the public officials in the Supervisor of Insurance office in the Ministry of Finance because today a question was answered with respect to the Winsure matter, and just a cursory glance of the independent actuary's report suggests to me that this is a scandalous affair. I have heard that this payment was in fact made even without the knowledge or approval of the Cabinet and I would want somebody on the other side to say that I am wrong, that in fact, this matter

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went to the Cabinet and it approved the payment of the \$66.9 million plus another \$9 million in interest, but this is a gift to Maritime Life, this is all that it is. We would have much more to say on this matter but I do not want to be caught in the slips as it were, Mr. Speaker, because I know you would tell me to come back.

I make a passing reference to this because I want to put it on the record and let public officials know that they have their responsibility. When I say this matter has a high degree of collusion, we see first of all, the normal independent actuary is no longer the independent actuary, they went forum shopping as it were, and found someone who says he relies on Maritime Life, he relies on the judicial management, he relies on everyone to pay money on lapsed policies, a whole portfolio of lapsed policies. They claim if a policy lapses and they do not give notice, it is still in force. All that one has to do in such a situation is to give the required notice which is 28 days and they could have done that long ago. [*Desk thumping*] But no, instead of that, they are giving millions of dollars in thin air, on lapsed policies gone long ago. What a pay-off fund investment. You buy a government and you get a treasury. That is what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago.

By now we are quite acquainted—and I think the country is—with the sleight of hand of this Government. I was in Siparia after the local government elections and I saw my two colleagues playing their games, the Member for Fyzabad and the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. I will tell them, however, that papa God does not sleep. They got their UNC people elected as chairman, but now they have to be fighting for their seats. I call it a spirit lash, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Both of them, while they had some in Siparia, let them now fight for Fyzabad and Pointe-a-Pierre and that ought to be a warning for all those who may believe that they can do anything and feel that their lives will not catch up with them. It has certainly caught up with my friend, the Member for Fyzabad and my other colleague, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Speaker, I am making the point that the EBC clearly is desirous of doing its work to ensure free and fair elections in Trinidad and Tobago. Looking at this legislation, and given the explanation that we received from the EBC, we are assured that the Elections and Boundaries Commission, thank God, is in very good hands. That does not mean that my friends on the other side would not try anything.

The head of the EBC says there is a newspaper report which says that there are about 40,000 Commonwealth citizens on the list, 10,000 of whom are Guyanese.

How come 25 per cent of Commonwealth citizens are coming from one small country? There are so many countries in the Commonwealth and if you have 25 per cent coming from one place, obviously it is very unusual.

Mr. Speaker, lo and behold, we see a functionary of that party, the communication officer saying no, it is not 10, it is five. I want to know how he knows. How he knows it is five and not 10? Is he now the CEO of the Elections and Boundaries Commission? I want him to explain, and that merely confirms that they are playing games, but I can tell them that we in the PNM have no fear. As I said earlier today they cannot try with 5,000, they really have to try with a minimum of 100,000, because their credibility has been so damaged, the transparency they exercise with respect to corruption has been so noted by this population that they would need at least 100,000 to rig this election. [*Crosstalk*] Afraid, afraid? You got “zugged” long time, so that I cannot even challenge you in Nariva.

Mr. Speaker, again I want to thank the Elections and Boundaries Commission for the job that organization has been doing to ensure free and fair elections. I have commented already on clause 8, I do not think there are any further amendments necessary there. With respect to clause 15 where we had a difficulty also, I think that all that is required is an amendment to make it clear that we are really talking about the area registration office for the electoral district. In other words, I am suggesting that the amendment in clause 15 of the Bill before us should go further than simply changing the words “conducting in” to the words “conducted for”. I think we should attempt to make it extremely clear that we are saying that an elector would have the privilege of registering either in the temporary registration site which is set up in the electoral district or area, or at the normal registration office for that electoral area. I suggest that we attempt an amendment to take that into consideration. That is the intent of the EBC, which concerned us and I think we ought to take that on board. While the EBC is desirous of ensuring free and fair elections, I cannot say the same thing for my colleagues on the other side as they are attempting to do all types of things to pad the voters list.

I ask them to desist from that approach, that they have to understand as leaders, we have an obligation to build institutions and to attempt even at this late stage to really gain the confidence of the population.

Thank you.

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, the Opposition today has made very serious allegations against the Government, against the Elections and Boundaries Commission, and against the Registrar General's department and it is therefore very important that we put this Bill in the perspective in which it has come here today. I will read the letter which the EBC wrote—they sent me a copy—to the Opposition after this debate started, that would show that this Bill is purely to implement what has been happening in practice for a long time.

We have had all sorts of matters in this debate—one Member talked about his constituency not getting enough, another Member talked about roads being paved. There were all sorts of things in this debate. It is a serious debate in which the Parliament has been asked to effect certain amendments to give the EBC the legal authority to put itself in a position to be able to follow some of the rules for the next general election. That is basically what this Bill is about.

Mr. Speaker, on the last occasion when I introduced this Bill, I said it was to bring the Representation of the People Act into conformity with the changes in the commission's operations as a result of computerization and the implied amendments made to the Act by the Municipal Corporation Act of 1990 which altered the structure of local government. It was also to delete existing provisions of the Act which are no longer applicable, to clarify ambiguities in the existing provisions of the Act, and to increase the fees and fines in order to accord with the changes which have taken place in the value of money since 1967 when the Act came into operation.

The Opposition used it as a platform for demonstrating their nervousness for the next general election. Everybody seems to be scared. They seem to be talking different policies, as a matter of fact, the hon. Member for Diego Martin East was criticizing the EBC, and I wrote it down. He talked about persons being registered and he talked about Guyanese.

2.00 p.m.

The EBC is governed by the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, the Representation of the People Act and the Representation of the People Election Rules. The Government does not register electors. The Opposition does not register electors. The institution responsible for the registration of electors to ensure that the conditions are satisfied is the Elections and Boundaries Commission. That is quite clear in the law.

If 10,000 Grenadians, 10,000 Jamaicans, 10,000 Guyanese or 10,000 English people have citizenship of Trinidad and Tobago and they are registered to vote on the electoral list, the Government did not do that. The Opposition did not do that. That is the Elections and Boundaries Commission. If it is, Mr. Speaker, that the Opposition, as a responsible Opposition, has a problem and believes that some of those registrations are not good, that they were done *ultra vires* the Act, that there was padding of the electors list—the Opposition went and spoke to the EBC just the other day.

When I read the letter, one would see what they talked about, and the Opposition could have raised that with them. They have not raised that with the EBC. The reason they have not raised it is because there is no basis for these allegations. They are only hoping that they would get in the newspapers to create panic and confusion. That is the purpose of it, because how else could a Member of Parliament—the Member for Diego Martin East comes here and talks at length about Guyanese being registered and saying how these people are registered.

That is supported also by some statement the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central just made, saying there was a release from the UNC party. Why have they introduced that in the debate? Obviously, they are trying to give the impression to the population that the EBC is not doing its job fairly and properly. The Opposition must know that the Government, as well as the Opposition, is not responsible for seeing that the conditions of the law are satisfied for people to be registered.

Then the hon. Member for Diego Martin East talked about identification cards, that the EBC has over 100,000 cards which have expired. Who is he blaming for that? The Government? He knows that the EBC, if that is so, is the institution which deals with it. Why did the Opposition not raise that with the EBC? Did the commission give them a satisfactory explanation? Are they saying therefore that the EBC is not doing its job and performing its function properly? These are the questions I am asking, because that is what they seem to be saying. If they are saying that, did they take it up with the EBC?

Then they come with this late registration of births programme. Now they are saying that the Registrar General is in conspiracy with the EBC to register people. That is again, panic. Where is the evidence? He read some section of an Act which he does not even understand.

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Mr. Speaker, let me put this in perspective. When we came here with this Bill, and the Bill was introduced, the Leader of the Opposition got up and asked certain questions. He wanted an opportunity before the debate continued, for the Opposition to consult with the EBC. The hon. Prime Minister immediately rose and made a contribution and agreed for the Government to postpone the debate so that those discussions could take place.

Mr. Speaker, where is the evidence that the Government wants to rush something through, did not want to give anybody any opportunity, and wanted to pass this thing through quickly? The time was given, and Mr. Speaker, I want to put on record a letter I received from the EBC which was addressed to Mr. Martin Joseph, MP, in relation to this Bill. This letter would, in effect, show, in my respectful view, how some of the allegations here are totally unfounded. It reads:

“Dear Sir,

Reclarification on specific areas of the Representation of the People Act (Amdt.) Bill, 2000, namely clause 3, clauses 8 and 9, and clause 15.

With reference to a recent conversation in which you raised the matter of your concerns regarding specific clauses of the Representation of the People (Amdt.) Bill, 2000, I wish to take this opportunity to provide some brief clarifications as to the intent and purpose of the recommended amendments. The following, I trust, will be helpful to you in your deliberations.

Clause 3, Registration Record.

Clause 3 would amend various sections of the Act to replace the term ‘registration record card’ with the more generic ‘registration record’. It is not the intention, as seems to be thought, to do away with the registration record card, since that is the source document from which the Commission’s electoral records are derived.”

Mr. Speaker, at no time in the debate, when it started, was the Bill presented as if it was to do away with that card. As a matter of fact, it was totally in conformity with what the EBC has said here. It continues:

“The registration record card would always constitute the principal electoral document in the unit register or binder and lodged at polling stations for use on polling day. This, together with the list of electors, essentially a summary of all the registration record cards contained in those unit registers,

will continue to constitute that essential element to vote as provided for in election rule 36 which states as follows:

No person shall be entitled to vote at a polling station or any polling division unless his registration record card appears in the unit register or his name appears on the revised list of electors for that polling division.

The purpose, therefore, of using the term 'registration record card' is to include within that term, the Commission's computerized database. It follows that the term 'registration record' would refer not only to the registration record card, but also to the electronic database which stores the information on the registration record card and from which the electoral list is printed.

Your concern, therefore, that the registration record cards might, or would become obsolete in our system is not well founded."

That is the Elections and Boundaries Commission talking. It continues:

"Please note that the present system has been in use since the computerization of our records in 1985."

So, Mr. Speaker, since 1985, in elections in Trinidad and Tobago, this practice has been used with the registration record card. Here it is, then and now, they are accusing the Government of fiddling with the election; of, in effect, trying to gain some unfair advantage.

I go further to clauses 8 and 9. Clauses 8 and 9, burden of proof, and we heard the Member for Diego Martin Central say that the EBC anticipates this Government, because it has taken steps. Mr. Speaker, let us hear about burden of proof:

"Clauses 8 and 9 amend sections 12 and 13 respectively of the Act:

- (a) to require or put the onus on a person seeking to qualify as an elector, whether it be for a parliamentary or local government election.
- (b) to produce the necessary documents needed to support his application for registration as an elector.

The intention of the words has nothing to do with the burden of proof required under the criminal law to establish criminal conduct. The intention of the words is to make certain that the applicant understands this very clearly before submitting his application under sections 12 and 13 of the Representation of the People Act.

The necessary documents the applicant is required to produce. For nationals

- (a) birth certificate and copy
- (b) accompanying affidavit and copy if name does not correspond with that on the birth certificate
- (c) a marriage certificate and copy, if a married woman is wishing to change her name.
- (d) a deed poll if names being used differ from those on birth certificates.

For non-nationals, as for nationals in respect of (a) to (d), all those above, plus appropriate documents from the Immigration Department.”

This is the Elections and Boundaries Commission talking. It continues:

“Moreover, this is the situation as it exists in practice and this amendment is only a formalization of that practice and this has been in existence since 1985.”

Mr. Speaker, 15 years ago, this was in practice, but we come here with a serious Bill and they talk about all these allegations. As a matter of fact, the hon. Member for Diego Martin East went so far to say that the EBC needs resources and the Government is not giving the EBC the resources.

I want to put it on record that the Elections and Boundaries Commission, under this administration, has got whatever resources it asked for. [*Desk thumping*] There is nothing the EBC has asked for, as far as resources are concerned, and this administration has not given it to them. The hon. Member for Diego Martin East was probably talking about refusal to give resources under the PNM administration.

Mr. Speaker, the letter continues with clause 15, because these are the three main concerns which were raised. It states:

“Clause 15, Electoral registration.

Clause 15 amends section 30 of the Representation of the People Act to allow registration to be conducted at the area registration offices which control the polling division for which the registration is done. Registration takes place continuously during the year and is conducted at our registration area offices. The registration area office is their accustomed and, indeed, the logical venue for persons attending to registration matters throughout the year, and persons are more familiar with its location than with the temporary

centres established for nine days in the electoral district. No matter how well advertised the latter are, the amendment is clearly intended for the convenience of the public.”

Are they against that? Why have they made all this fuss? This letter is signed by the Chief Elections Officer, the Elections and Boundaries Commission. I cannot understand the signature.

I will read the accompanying letter that came so that I could put it on record. This letter was addressed to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of the Attorney General:

“Dear Madam,

I am directed by the Chairman of the Elections and Boundaries Commission to send for the information of the Attorney General, a copy of the letter sent to the General Secretary of the People’s National Movement regarding clarification on specific areas of the Representation of the People (Amdt.) Bill, 2000, namely clauses 3, 8, 9 and 15.

Yours sincerely,”

It is signed by the Chief Elections Officer of the Elections and Boundaries Commission. That letter was dated June 23, 2000 and the attached letter was one sent to Mr. Joseph on June 21, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, another letter that came to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of the Attorney General dated June 20, 2000 states:

“Dear Madam,

I am directed by the Chairman of the Elections and Boundaries Commission to send for the information of the Attorney General, a copy of the letter sent to the General Secretary of the People's National Movement regarding clarification of clause 3, Representation of the People Act (Amdt.) Bill, 2000.

The Elections and Boundaries Commission, at a meeting held yesterday, considered the terms of my letter to you dated June 21, 2000, a copy of which was sent to the honourable Attorney General, and decided that for greater clarity and to remove any possible ambiguity, the third sentence of the paragraph under the rubric ‘Registration Record’ will read as follows:

‘The registration record card will now be included in the term “registration record” and would always constitute the principal electoral document in the

unit register or binder and lodged at the polling station for use on the polling day.’

Please be good enough to make this change and be guided accordingly.”

Mr. Speaker, what we did was to accept that. The Government, just as we postponed the debate, accepted that and drafted the necessary amendment and circulated it.

Where is the serious evidence, if anybody wants to look at this seriously, to say that the Government is trying to do anything which is adverse in order to have an election which is not free or fair? Where is the evidence, Mr. Speaker, that this Government has interfered with the discretion and functions of the Elections and Boundaries Commission? None!

2.15 p.m.

I am coming to late registration, but here it is that this Government is accused of being political criminals—very strong words “political criminals”. But, Mr. Speaker, an Opposition must be political criminals if they know there is no evidence to support allegations like these and when it comes to an independent commission, like the Elections and Boundaries Commission, making allegations which directly or indirectly could give the impression to the public that the commission is unfair and the commission is not performing its functions properly.

The hon. Member for Diego Martin Central recognized that the Member for Diego Martin East made an error and was giving the wrong signals so he tried to salvage it by saying that he is satisfied with the EBC but when an Opposition speaks, it speaks with one voice.

Dr. Griffith: It should.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: There are not two oppositions or three oppositions. But then, the hon. Member for Diego Martin East seems to have been their leader because he said he hopes by his contribution, he has set the tone for the debate. The debate started on the last occasion after the Government made its presentation when the Leader of the Opposition spoke so the hon. Member for Diego Martin East is saying, “Listen, forget what he says. He is not the leader; I am the leader and I am better than the Opposition Chief Whip, too. I am setting the tone for this.” Therefore, he is saying what he says has more weight than the Opposition Chief Whip. He is the spokesperson for the Opposition so when he says that the Elections and Boundaries Commission is not doing its job properly and when he accuses the EBC of being unfair, I make the point, he is the person who has set the tone.

Mr. Speaker, if they have not made representations to the EBC, they can go now to make representations. The Government does not interfere and does not intend to interfere with the functioning and duties of the EBC. If they go to the EBC and they are not happy, the procedure provides for the Leader of the Opposition to have discussions with the Prime Minister and if they are still dissatisfied, they can go to court. The law provides they can go to court to challenge the commission. But it is not right for the Opposition to come to the Parliament to make these accusations and allegations about people who cannot defend themselves, especially an elections and boundaries commission.

It did not end there. They were not satisfied with that. As a matter of fact, the Member for Diego Martin East said that the Government can “tief” the election. He said the Government can “tief” the election. With these measures I just talked about, implementing practice, passing law on the request of the EBC, to put in law clear terms that have been followed since 1985. In 1958, there was the People's National Movement in office; in 1986, there was the National Alliance for Reconstruction; then in 1991, there was the People's National Movement and now there is the UNC administration.

Here it is, according to the hon. Member for Diego Martin East, this election could be stolen by Government. All I could say is that somebody is getting political “too tool bay”. I do not know what is happening. For the last few weeks, the other side has been becoming nervous. It is like going into a football match, like Panama—Panama is nervous right now, afraid of the licks in Trinidad on Wednesday. Look at them; they are getting nervous. I have never seen them so nervous for the last few weeks.

Mr. G. Singh: Ask Eddie Hart.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: I thought that the choosing of candidates and the naming of some of them would have solved this nervousness but the nervousness still remains.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: He only chose four of you all. What happened to the rest?

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Before I go to this late registration, this new election gimmick that the Opposition mentioned. Before I go to that, the allegation has been made that the EBC sent these matters since 1998 and the hon. Member for St. Ann's East said, “Well, I would not want to say inefficiency or incompetence.”

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But, giving the impression that since 1998 is too long a time to deal with these matters. You see, Mr. Speaker, I sympathize with the hon. Member for St. Ann's East because he does not understand the volume and nature of the work involved, so I will give him an idea.

When the EBC sends its recommendations, it sends its suggested amendments and recommendations to amend, consolidate and update the Representation of the People Act and the rules made thereunder, consisting of the Registration Rules, the Election Rules and the Prescribed Form Rules. When this was obtained by the Attorney General, the Attorney General passed it to the Law Commission and I am informed that the Law Commission, in order to take steps to do the necessary matters to carry out or to implement the recommendations, found it necessary first to consolidate the Act by incorporating all the amendments which had been made to that Act since its last revision 20 years ago. So the Law Commission, which at that time included the Law Revision Department, had to consolidate all the Acts and the rules to ensure that all the reforms and amendments that took place 20 years ago were effected.

I am told that this exercise entailed having to examine about 50 pieces of legislation, mostly rules, which the EBC in one of its letters, described as multitudinous. Additionally, the EBC submitted recommendations to amend the Registration Rules, the Election Rules and the Prescribed Form Rules. These recommendations had to be examined in order to ensure that they fell within the rule-making powers as contained in the Act. That exercise was a formidable and time-consuming one, since it involved several meetings with the EBC in order to ensure that the amendments contained in the Bill are those which had been recommended.

When all that was done, the Law Commission and the Law Revision Department had drafts. They had to be studied by the EBC. There were changes. There were further discussions. So, what has happened is that it has resulted in not only the revision and this amendment, but the rules which have to be effected have all been done, so that when this is passed, the necessary steps will be taken in order to have under the Representation of the People Act, the Registration (Amdt.) Rules, 2000; the Election (Amdt.) Rules, 2000 and the Prescribed Form (Amdt.) Rules, 2000.

If the hon. Member for St. Ann's East thought that these voluminous documents purely just had to go to the Attorney General, be passed to the Law

Commission and, “Open Sesame”, or “Abracadabra”, it is done, he has made a mistake. The law does not work in that way. It takes time. As a matter of fact, the Opposition will well know that some of the laws it drafted, it took 20 years to draft and they were still not drafted when they left.

I think it is important for me to remind this honourable House and hon. Members of what the Chairman of the EBC said in the *Report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission on the Review of Constituency Boundaries pursuant to Section 72 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago* dated May 9, 1996, which was laid in this Parliament. I am reading from Roman numeral VIII under the heading Independence of the Commission.

“In formulating its recommendations, however, the Commission exercises independent judgement. It brooks no interference or directions whatsoever, from any other person or authority. The same is to be asserted for the discharge of the functions vested in it exclusively, for the registration of voters and the conduct of election. In performing these functions, the Commission is not ‘subject to the direction or control of any person or authority’. Section 71 of the Constitution, a deeply entrenched provision thereof, proclaims this independence in the clearest terms. All persons therefore, who are infected with perceptions to the contrary, or with the notion that the Commission, in the discharge of its functions, is ‘a servant of the Centurion’, as it were, should disabuse their minds of these discordant maladies and move on.”

Mr. Speaker, I find those are very apt words to quote in this debate today because the Chairman of the commission—and the commission in its report—has made it quite clear that when it comes to the registration of voters and the conduct of elections, that is a function vested in it exclusively and no amount of accusations in Parliament would cause them not to do their duty properly or to discharge their functions properly. So, if the Opposition believes that it can come and accuse the commission of not performing its functions properly, it has another thought.

“In performing these functions, the Commission is not ‘subject to the direction or control of any person or authority’ ...All persons therefore, who are infected with perceptions to the contrary...”

The Opposition is, obviously, infected with the perception that the commission is not performing its functions properly.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know why when Members here do not really understand what is happening they attempt to debate without checking their facts. We had the other allegation, conspiracy. The Registrar General—as a matter of fact, the Member for Diego Martin Central did not even know whether the Registrar General was a man or a woman.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: It is a post.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: As a matter of fact, I do not blame him because he seems not to know the distinction between man and woman, but the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central should have known his constituents. The Registrar General is a constituent of Diego Martin Central and he does not seem to know even that. That shows he does not service his constituency.

Mr. Speaker, the Registrar General, under our Constitution, is appointed by the Judicial and Legal Service Commission and the Registrar General's department is one which is entrusted with the responsibility for the registration of births, deaths and other matters.

Mr. Speaker, in 1998, there was a proposal from the Minister of Social and Community Development that in order for Trinidad and Tobago to comply with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which convention was ratified by the Government in 1991, it was very important to comply with the requirement to ensure that persons who were born in Trinidad and Tobago had birth certificates.

2.30 p.m.

In 1995 there was a Cabinet-appointed ministerial committee under the Ministry of Social Development to monitor implementation of measures outlined in this country's national plan of action for the survival, protection and development of children for the achievement of goals towards the year 2000 as set out in the declaration of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Mr. Speaker, the committee addressed the issue of unregistered births in Trinidad and Tobago and it came to the forefront of both the national and international consciousness. There was media coverage of the United Nations report on the worldwide incidence of unregistered births and the resulting lack of proof of age, which had a negative impact on the lives of children in terms of the inability to enroll in school, lack of protection under the law, the prosecution of minors under the law and, in the long term, the inability to obtain a marriage licence and the inability to access employment.

It was suggested that the programme would include all persons in Trinidad and Tobago because it was found from whatever information the ministry had that there were in excess of 10,000 persons in Trinidad and Tobago who, for one reason or the other, were not registered. The previous Minister of Legal Affairs, in 1998, in collaboration with the Minister of Social Development, took steps and started to work on this programme. The Ministry of Social Development referred to Article No. 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child which says:

- “1. The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.
2. States Parties shall ensure the implementation of these rights in accordance with their national law and their obligations under the relevant international instruments in this field...”

Mr. Speaker, since 1998 this programme was being planned because under the existing set-up if anybody in Trinidad and Tobago does not live in Port of Spain and has an unregistered birth to be registered, that process has to take place in Port of Spain. This process entails having an interview at which time the person would be told what documents they had to get and these documents had to be obtained and returned to be processed.

Mr. Speaker, the law is quite clear on this. Under sections 19 and 20 of the Births and Registrations Act, Chap. 44:01 the Registrar General is directed to keep a register of births in Trinidad and Tobago. The Act also imposes a duty, firstly on the parents of a child to register its birth with the district registrar of births within a period of three months. Thereafter a birth can only be registered with the approval of the Superintendent of Registrar within one year, and after one year only with the approval of the Registrar General. Applications for registration after one year are considered late registration.

Mr. Speaker, this programme is one which the officers of the Ministry of Community Development, together with the Registrar General, initiated and they have been in the forefront of the programme. When the launching occurred, the Registrar General made it quite clear that in Trinidad and Tobago it has been the practice for persons over 18 years of age who never had birth certificates to come and register; and this has been done from time immemorial. The Registrar General, under the law, has been doing late registration of births from persons

who are under and over 18 years of age. That is provided for under section (19)2 of the Act which states:

“After the expiration of twelve months next after the birth of any child, that birth shall not be registered except with the written authority of the Registrar General for registering the same, and except in accordance with the prescribed Rules, and the fact of such authority having been given shall be entered in the register.”

The Register General can do that in accordance with the prescribed rules.

Mr. Speaker, I am informed that the prescribed rules for such a practice and the rules which have been operating in Trinidad and Tobago in respect of the late registration of a child born in Trinidad and Tobago after 12 months from the date of the birth of the child, if that time has elapsed, where the child is born at a hospital or other birthing institutions, such application should be accompanied by:

- (i) the immunization card of the child;
- (ii) the marriage certificate of the parents;
- (iii) the birth certificates of all siblings born before and after the child;
- (iv) the identification card of the mother or father of the child or where possible the identification cards of both;
- (v) a letter from the school attended by the child stating the date of birth of the child as it appears on the registers of the schools;
- (vi) a baptismal certificate, if any, of the child;
- (vii) an affidavit of the mother or father of the child stating the reason for the non-registration of birth of the child; and
- (viii) a letter from the hospital stating the date of birth of the child.

Where the child is born at home the application should be accompanied by all of the items mentioned above and also an affidavit from a person other than the mother or father of the child who was present at the birth and an affidavit from a person from a category listed in the Schedule who knows the child and has known the mother, father or both for a period commencing not less than five years before the date of the affidavit.

Mr. Speaker, this programme that Members opposite are alleging is one in which the Registrar General is in conspiracy with the EBC, is one in which— instead of persons having to come to Port of Spain in order to attend to these

matters—persons in different parts of the country would be able to go to the warden's office, where there will be staff from the Registrar General's office on certain dates and times that will be advertised. Members of the public would go there and make their applications. The staff of the Register General's department would then bring those applications back to Port of Spain where they would be processed and the birth certificates, if they are approved having satisfied all the required conditions, would be delivered to the persons on their doorsteps.

Mr. Sinanan: Mr. Speaker, could the hon. Attorney General state whether the Register General's department is sufficiently staffed at the moment to undertake such an exercise?

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question, but if the hon. Member had been following the programme he would have seen that additional staff was taken on especially for this programme. That is why it had to take some time to plan it. As a matter of fact, it is a programme in which, apart from advertisements, there are community groups in the areas involved and additional staff in order to ensure people get their birth certificates.

I do not understand why an Opposition would be against people getting their birth certificates. If one does not have a birth certificate one is deprived of an opportunity for pension, schooling or to get married. One has no nationality. One is not a person. I do not understand.

Mr. Speaker, I am not surprised because they are not interested in people. They are interested in themselves. Here it is you have a programme in which people throughout Trinidad and Tobago—people would not have to pay passage—would get an opportunity to get a birth certificate at warden offices at Roxborough, Tobago, Arima, Chaguanas, Tunapuna, Princes Town, Toco, Siparia, Rio Claro, Sangre Grande, Cedros, Couva, La Brea, Point Fortin, in addition San Fernando and Port of Spain to make them a person in law. What does the Opposition want? They want these people to stay without a birth certificate. They want them to travel to Port of Spain for interviews then to go back to where they came from, to come back again to go back to come back. That is what they have been doing under the PNM administration. No attempt was made for them to implement this programme.

Mr. Speaker, during the last week of registration in Arima, 173 persons who did not have birth certificates applied. Is the Opposition saying that they are against the people of Arima; that they do not want this programme to go to

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Arima; that they want this programme to stop? Do they want for the people of Arima not to get pension? Do they not want children who cannot go to school in Arima because they do not have a birth certificate to be able to? I tell the Opposition that we are not going to stop it because the people of Arima deserve justice. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the people of Trinidad and Tobago deserve justice and they did not get it under the PNM administration.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, on the first day of the programme in Princes Town, 97 persons applied for birth certificates.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I just want to ask the Leader of Government Business in the House, how is he going to prove that a pensioner who would now apply to register for a birth certificate, in fact, was born in Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker I wish the people of Diego Martin Central could have seen the Member's smile to see how he is laughing at them; laughing at poor people. Laughing at pensioners. He does not care. Hear what he is asking: How could you determine if a pensioner needs a birth certificate? Is that something difficult to determine under the rules and regulations in existence? Over the years this is how it has been determined. All that is happening now is that it has been found out that the Government did not take the programme to the people and that there is too much bureaucracy in order for it to be done at two places in Trinidad and Tobago and that the Government must help in bringing justice closer to the people so that they will have access to justice on their doorstep and the PNM is against it. Now, they want to ask all kinds of questions. Hear the other question now.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I will ask it indeed. Is the Attorney General able to tell us of any case where someone obtaining the age of 65 years continued without a pension because he or she could not get a birth certificate? I want to further say that in all cases where an individual found that the birth certificate was necessary he or she, no doubt, would have journeyed to wherever he or she had to go in order to get it. [*Interruption*] However the hardship. It is the intervention of the Government at that crucial time that is causing concern. It is not that we are not concerned about the people.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, I would give way to a question and not a statement. Mr. Speaker that contribution by the hon. Member for Laventille

East/Morvant has described PNM philosophy for people; that they must come to Port of Spain in order to get it. If they cannot come to town to get it, they cannot get it. So, the people of Toco must come to town. The people of Arima must come to town and the people from Point Fortin must come to town. If they cannot come to town to get a birth certificate they are not entitled to it.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, approximately 170 people in Arima could not come to town to get their birth certificates. If they complied with the requirements the Register General will have a duty in law to give it to them. The people in Princes Town, and when the time comes, the people in Roxborough, Tobago, Arima, Chaguanas, Tunapuna, Toco, Siparia, Rio Claro, Sangre Grande, Cedros, Couva, La Brea, Point Fortin and San Fernando. The Member opposite does not like these poor people. He gets up to ask a question: Could you tell me of a 65-year-old person who did not have a birth certificate and cannot get pension? As a Member of Parliament for 10 years I know of a lot of people who, because they did not have a birth certificate, cannot get pension. However, it may be that they do not go to their constituency office. They do not see people. There are at least 10,000 people in Trinidad and Tobago who cannot access benefits from the state because they do not have a birth certificate.

2.45 p.m.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, the day that the programme was launched there was a lady over 60 years who did not have a birth certificate and she could not apply for anything. They do not know the injustice that people are suffering—and look at him—because they sat down and did nothing about it. If he does not know, some people cannot do something about it because they cannot afford to go from Arima to Port of Spain with taxi and come back, and go back and come back and go back.

All they can say is that they are the longest surviving party in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: It is true!

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: The longest surviving party, but what is a party? A party consists of people with heart; people who like people.

Hon. Members: You!

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Look at them, they have come here to oppose measures for pensioners, for children. [*Crosstalk*] I think they believe that they could win

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elections by just coming here and saying, “We go win the election; we go win the election!” If you notice, all they talked about for the last few weeks is “we go win the elections”. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: I think what is happening is that they are preparing for loss already. It is the loser syndrome setting in. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, what is very significant when matters like these come about—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: May I appeal to Members that we conduct the business of the Parliament in a more civil manner. As I said, it is obvious that we are approaching that time, but please one at a time.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, they do not have any concern; 10,000 children could not have had secondary places, they were not concerned; 10,000 persons do not have birth certificates, they are not concerned. As long as they could go to the country and talk about corruption and other matters and come here hoping to get some section of the media to print some negative thing to cause panic, that is what they are concerned about. They are not concerned about people. If they were concerned about people they would have come here and said whether they wanted this Bill approved. They would have told us what recommendations they made to the EBC.

As a matter of fact, in these measures the elections expenses of Members of Parliament have been increased, and I would add that this was very significant, that we could have had the view of the Opposition. Clause 21 states:

“Section 48 of the Act is amended in subsection (1), by deleting the words ‘five thousand dollars’ and ‘two thousand five hundred dollars’ and substituting the words ‘fifty thousand dollars’ and ‘twenty-five thousand dollars’ respectively.”

We all know that after a general election Members of Parliament have to show that they did not spend more than \$5,000, and now it is being increased to \$50,000. I thought that they would have had something to say. Should that be increased did they not want to make recommendations? What did they do? But they come here to talk about matters which have been in practice all the time.

Mr. Hinds: Then why the launch? Why the invitations if it was happening all the time?

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: I do not think the Opposition would understand, but may I say on record that I object to the Opposition trying to intimidate public

officers. I take great objections to the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central when he said that he was sending a warning to the Registrar General and all public officers that they must do their duties.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I never used the word “warning”; never.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: He said mindful of their functions and the system of Government, public officers are held accountable and public officials must ensure that they do their duty. There must be a high level of integrity of public officials, and he was talking about the Registrar General.

I want him to know that the Registrar General has a duty to do and the Opposition cannot intimidate her, and that the Government would protect any public officer whom the Government intends to intimidate from doing their duty—[*Laughter*] [*Interruption*]*—whom the Opposition intends to intimidate. The Government will protect any public official whom the Opposition intends to intimidate.*

He also talked about other public servants. It seems to me that the Opposition intends to try to use the Parliament as a way of intimidating public officers, but public officers have their duty to do, and if they are interfered with in the performance of their duty by anyone, including Members of the Opposition, they would probably have to face the consequences. Therefore, I want to put on record that the Registrar General’s department has done its duty. They are acting in accordance with the law and they should be congratulated and complimented for the good work they have been doing in order to ensure that people in the outlying districts of Trinidad and Tobago have access to justice on their doorsteps.

I think it is important for me in winding up to deal with some of the measures in this Bill in order to further show that this Bill really was not a serious measure. It was a measure which, as the EBC said, was to give effect to what was already in existence. Clause 7 took steps to implement the training course, which the EBC said had been in train for some time.

Mr. Speaker, clause 8 amends section 12, which had contained the words:

“has resided in that electoral district for a period of at least two months preceding the qualifying date”

What that amendment did was to make it clear that persons had to reside in the area for, at least, two months.

There has been discussion in respect of clauses 8 and 9, that dealt with the question of the burden of proof. Clause 10 amends section 18 by including the computerized database as an official means of keeping the registration record. Clause 11 amends section 25 by creating the post of “authorized registering officer” and granting to that officer the authority to object to allowing the registration of any person as an elector.

Clause 12 amends section 26 and complements clause 11, which amends section 25 by making it the responsibility of the Chief Election Officer and not the registration officer to handle the appeal of any person seeking to be registered as an elector.

Clause 14 amends section 29 by deleting subsection (6) and 6(A) since these provisions were made for the municipal council and county council elections. Clause 15 amends section 30 by no longer restricting electoral registration to the district in which the election is to be held, by substituting the words “conducted in” for the words “conducted for”.

Clause 16 amends section 31, and it is merely consequential, and inserts the new post of “Deputy Chief Election Officer”. Clause 17 amends section 33 by deleting in subsection (2) the words “the same day for the nomination of candidates and the day for the taking of the poll” and substituting the words:

“the date for the nomination of candidates and the date for the taking of the poll”

In other words, what the amendment seeks to do is to no long require the day for the nomination of the candidates and the day for the taking of the poll to be the same.

Clause 17 amends subsection (3)(a) to increase the number of days required for the nomination of candidates from not less than seven days to not less than 14 days after the issue of the election writ. It also by subsection (3)(b) of the Act amends it to increase the number of days for the poll from not less than seven days to not less than 21 days after the day of nomination.

Mr. Speaker, clause 21, as I said, increased the quantum of election expenses that is permissible, and the rest of matters in the Bill mostly dealt with the question of increased amounts in respect of fines and other financial requirements.

The Government wishes to say that if there are any complaints about the Elections and Boundaries Commission, the Opposition knows how to deal with those complaints. The Government has given the EBC all the necessary resources

and if the Opposition is dissatisfied with the EBC, apart from the Leader of the Opposition having discussions with the hon. Prime Minister, the Opposition and any member of the public is at liberty to take the EBC to court, if they believe that the EBC is not performing its function.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Mr. Chairman: I take it that everybody has the list of amendments circulated by the Attorney General?

Clauses 1 to 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4.

Question proposed, That clause 4 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 4 be amended as follows:

“Clause 4 is amended by renumbering ‘(b)’ and ‘(c)’ as ‘(c)’ and ‘(d)’ respectively and inserting a new paragraph ‘(b)’ as follows:

(b) inserting after the definition of ‘registration area’ the following new definition:

‘registration record’ included all information with respect to an elector or non-electore required under the Act recorded electronically or on a registration card kept in a unit register;”

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 4, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

3.00 p.m.

Clause 5.

Question proposed, That clause 5 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 5 be amended as follows:

“Clause 5 is repealed and replaced as follows:

Section 3 5. Section 3 of the Act is amended—
Amended (a) by inserting after subsection (5) the
 following:

- (6) There shall be an Assistant Chief Election Officer who is subject to the authority, direction and control of the Commission, and he shall perform such of the functions and exercise such of the powers of the Chief Election Officer as may be assigned to him by the Commission.
- (7) In the absence of the Deputy Chief Election Officer or if the office is vacant, the Assistant Chief Election Officer may act in his place and, while so acting, shall possess the like powers and perform the like duties as a Deputy Chief Election Officer.”

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 5, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 6 to 8 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 9.

Question proposed, That clause 9 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 9 be amended as follows:

“Delete the words ‘subsection (1)(b)’ and substitute the words ‘subsection (1)’.”

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 9, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 10 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 11.

Question proposed, That clause 11 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 11 be amended as follows:

“In paragraph (a) delete the words ‘subsection (1)’ and substitute the words ‘subsections (1) and (2)’”

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 11, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 12 to 14 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 15.

Question proposed, That clause 15 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Chairman, I think for the avoidance of doubt, as I mentioned in my contribution I am suggesting that we leave the words “conducted in”.

Mr. Maharaj: Which part of clause 15 is that? Is it section 30 of the Act?

Mr. Valley: Yes.

Mr. Maharaj: Is it section 30(1), (2) or (3)?

Mr. Valley: It is section 30(1).

Mr. Maharaj: I am not understanding the amendment.

Mr. Valley: At present, the section talks about the electoral registration being conducted in the electoral district. The amendment proposed for clause 15 talks about “conducted for” and you would recall from that, there was some misunderstanding as to the intent of the amendment. I think we would still have the registration offices in the electoral districts. The intent as explained by the Elections and Boundaries Commission is that they want to continue the registration in the normal area registration offices for that particular electoral district.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Chairman, I am not moving an amendment yet, we are just discussing it. Could we have after the words “conducted in”, the words “the registration area offices, or the temporary registration area offices established in the electoral district in which the election is to be held.” Are you with me? If after the words “conducted in”—

Mr. Valley: We are changing the words “conducted in” to “conducted for”.

Mr. Maharaj: In light of what you are saying, let us assume that we put the words “conducted in”, we put “the registration area offices, or the temporary registration offices established in the electoral districts...”

Mr. Valley: Okay.

Mr. Maharaj: Will that be satisfactory?

Mr. Valley: Yes.

Mr. Maharaj: I think that should make it quite clear.

Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that section 30(1) of the Act be amended as follows:

“By adding after the words ‘conducted in’, the words, ‘the registration area offices, or the temporary registration area offices established in’...”

Mr. Maharaj: Is that all right?

Mr. Valley: Yes, that is fine.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 15, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 16 to 18 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 19 to 25.

Question proposed, That clauses 19 to 25 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clauses 19 to 25 be amended as circulated:

“Renumber as clauses 20 to 46, respectively and insert after clause 18, the following:

Section 46 amended	19. Section 46 of the Act is amended by deleting the words ‘five hundred dollars’ and substituting the words ‘five thousand dollars’.”
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Mr. Valley: I do not understand.

Mr. Chairman: What happens is the circulated draft simply deals with a renumbering from clauses 19 to 45 and we are doing clauses 19 to 25 now. So all that is happening there is purely a renumbering.

Question put and agreed to.

Clauses 19 to 25, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 26.

Question proposed, That clause 26 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 26 be amended as follows:

“A. Renumber ‘(a)’ and ‘(b)’ as ‘(b)’ and ‘(c)’ respectively;

B. Insert a new ‘(a)’ as follows:

(a) in subsection (1)(a), by inserting after the word ‘Assistant’ the word ‘Chief’.”

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 26, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 27 to 45.

Question proposed, That clauses 27 to 45 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Chairman, just for the record, I beg to move that clauses 27 to 45 be amended as circulated for the renumbering.

“Renumber as clauses 20 to 46, respectively and insert after clause 18, the following:

Section 46
amended

19. Section 46 of the Act is amended by deleting the words ‘five hundred dollars’ and substituting the words ‘five thousand dollars’.”

Question put and agreed to.

Clauses 27 to 45, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New clause 19.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Chairman, I propose a new clause 19 which reads as follows:

“Section 46
amended

19. Section 46 of the Act is amended by deleting the words ‘five hundred dollars’ and substituting the words ‘five thousand dollars’.”

New clause 19 read the first time.

Question proposed, That the new clause be read a second time.

Question put and agreed to.

Question proposed, That the new clause be added to the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

New clause 19 added to the Bill.

Third Schedule ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill, as amended, be reported to the House.

House resumed.

Bill reported, with amendment; read the third time and passed.

3.15 p.m.

SOCIALLY DISPLACED PERSONS BILL

[SECOND DAY]

The committee of the whole House resumed its deliberations on the Bill.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we do have circulated a list of amendments to be moved by the Minister of Social and Community Development. I take it that everybody has a copy of it. I see that it takes in clauses beginning with clause 1.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Chairman, what occurred on the last occasion is that the Opposition raised concerns with some of the provisions of the Bill, particularly about the fact that persons could have been taken off the streets and there will be no due process of law in relation to some of them. What happened is that we had given an undertaking at that time that we were going to look at the Bill again and go back to see how we could put certain safeguards, however difficult it was. What we did is that we went through the Bill, so I do not know if with the consent of the House, we will start from clause 1, with all the amendments.

Agreed to.

Mr. Chairman: The amendment here, does that relate to clause 1 or 2?

Mr. Maharaj: It is clause 1.

Mr. Chairman: With the consent of the House, we will start again at the very beginning.

Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3.

Question proposed, That clause 3 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Ramsaran: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 3 be amended as follows:

In the definition of “socially displaced person” insert after the word “annoyance” the words “or damage”.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, we have no difficulty with the amendment that is presented. However, with regard to the definition of “care centre”, in the body of the legislation, at clause 19, it talks about the establishment of care centres and it says that every person who is admitted to a care centre should be under the care and supervision of a medical practitioner. We were wondering if there was a need to indicate in the definition section at that aspect of the definition of care centre, the need for it to be either supervised by a medical practitioner or for the medical practitioner to be part and parcel of the care centre. That seems to be an integral part of the care centre's operation, that a medical practitioner should be there to supervise the inmates.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Chairman, I do not know if the hon. Member looked at clause 19.

Mrs. Robinson Regis: Mr. Chairman, that is the clause I am talking about. I know that essentially, the definition is correct in that “care centre” means any house, but 19(2) says that every person who has been admitted must be under the care and supervision of a medical practitioner. I want to know if in the definition, we need to indicate that the care centre must have some access to a medical practitioner, because that seems to be an integral part of the care centre's operation.

Mr. Maharaj: I do not think so, because it says here that a care centre means any house, home or facility approved as such under section 19. Under section 19, it says—Oh, I see what you mean. Whether the care centre itself—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes. Needs to have.

Mr. Maharaj: Perhaps we could discuss this a little more. If you have a care centre but there is no medical practitioner in charge or under the supervision of, would it likely be that such centres would not be run in the best interest of the

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inmates? I do not know. The way it is drafted, it does not necessarily mean that the care centre would be under the supervision of.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I am aware of that, but the way that 19(2) reads, where it says that every person shall be under the care and supervision suggests to me that that should be an ongoing thing. It cannot be that a doctor comes in occasionally.

Mr. Maharaj: I was trying to articulate that even if there is a doctor who is not permanently attached, but who would be attached and who would, in effect, delegate, but at least you know that doctor would—because not all these centres would have a doctor permanently. Care centre means any house, home or facility approved as such under section 19 for the reception of socially displaced persons or in need of care and treatment. Do you want us to leave it and when we come to clause 19, we will deal with it? We will put a separate thing.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Sure.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, it is agreed that we will return to the amendment to clause 3.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, under clause 3 in that same section, I am wondering if the term “field officer” should have been defined, because throughout the Bill it talks about a field officer being able to do certain things, and I think it starts at clause 15, where it says “where a field officer determines upon investigation”. Then, throughout the Bill it talks about the job of a field officer. I am thinking that perhaps the term “field officer” needs to be defined.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Chairman, I must say that I agree with the hon. Member that there should be a definition because it is mentioned several times in the Bill.

Mr. Chairman: We will look at that when we come back to it. Is there any other thing you have on clause 3?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Well, then clause 3 will be revisited.

Clauses 4 to 14 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 15.

Question proposed, That clause 15 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Ramsaran: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 15 be amended as follows:

Delete clause 15 and substitute the following:

“15. Where a field officer determines upon investigation that a socially displaced person is unwilling to seek admission to an assessment centre and cannot be persuaded to do so, the field officer shall submit to the Unit a written report on the case.”

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 15, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

3.30 p.m.

Clause 16.

Question proposed, That clause 16 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Ramsaran: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 16 be amended in terms of the circulated draft as follows:

A. Delete subclause (1) and substitute the following—

“16 (1) Where upon receipt of the report, referred to in section 5, the Unit is satisfied that all efforts to persuade the person named in the report to be admitted to an assessment centre, have failed, the Unit shall make an application in the prescribed form to the court for an order to admit that person to the centre.”

B. Insert a subclause (3) as follows—

“the person referred to in subclause (1) shall be served with a copy of the Order referred to in subclause (2).”

C. Insert subclause (4) as follows—

“(4) Notwithstanding any other written law to the contrary, the order is deemed to be a summons—

(a) Issued in accordance with section 42 and served in accordance with section 43 respectively of the Summary

Chap. 4:20 Courts Act; and

(b) Requiring the person to appear in Court on the day and time stated therein to show cause why he should not be admitted to the centre.”

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Question put and agreed to.

Clause 16, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 17 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 18.

Question proposed, That clause 18 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Ramsaran: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 18 be amended in terms of the circulated draft as follows:

Insert after subclause (2), the following subclause:

“(3) Where a field officer removes a socially displaced person in accordance with this section, the Unit shall inform the next of kin or closest relative of the socially displaced person as soon as it is reasonably practicable to do so.”

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 18, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 19.

Question proposed, That clause 19 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Chairman, I had undertaken to look at clause 19. I beg to move that clause 19 be amended by inserting subclause (7) to the following effect:

“Every care centre shall be under the supervision of a medical practitioner.”

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Is that a new subclause (7)?

Mr. Maharaj: Yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 19, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 20 to 22 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 23.

Question proposed, That clause 23 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Ramsaran: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 23 be amended in terms of the circulated draft as follows:

Delete the words “at intervals of three months” and substitute the words “on a monthly basis”.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 23, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 24 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 25.

Question proposed, That clause 25 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Ramsaran: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 25 be amended in terms of the circulated draft as follows:

A. Delete subclause (1) and substitute the following—

“(1) A relative or friend who is willing and able to provide for a socially displaced person who is being cared for at a care centre, may apply to the Director to have that person placed under the care and control of that relative or friend.

(2) Where the Director is satisfied that the applicant can provide adequate care and support for the socially displaced person, he may discharge that person into the care of the applicant.”

B. Renumber subclause (2) as subclause (3).

C. In subclause (3) as renumbered, delete the words “in writing within 48 hours” and insert after the word “support”, the words “as soon as it is reasonably practicable to do so”.

D. Renumber subclause (3) as subclause (4) and delete the word “(2)” in subclause (4) and substitute the word “(3)”.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 25, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 26 to 28 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 29.

Question proposed, That clause 29 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Ramsaran: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 29 be amended in terms of the circulated draft as follows:

- A. In paragraph (b), insert after the word “on” the word “summary”.
- B. Delete the words “three months” and insert the words “one month”.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 29, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 30.

Question proposed, That clause 30 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Ramsaran: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 30 be amended in terms of the circulated draft as follows:

In paragraph (c)—

- (a) Insert after the word “on” the word “summary”.
- (b) Delete the words “one year” and substitute the words “three months”.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 30, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 31 to 33 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3 reintroduced.

Mr. Chairman: Shall we now return to clause 3 and “field officer”?

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Chairman, can I ask for clause 3 to be amended by the insertion of the definition of “field officer” as follows:

“ ‘Field officer’ means a person responsible for the initial assessment of a socially displaced person before he is admitted to a care centre.”

Mr. Chairman, before you put the question, let it be:

“...before he is admitted to an assessment centre.”

Mr. Chairman: Instead of “care centre”.

Mr. Maharaj: Yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, I apologize but I just wanted to find out, given that definition, if the field officer would be deemed a part of the staff of the unit.

Mr. Maharaj: No. He could be a volunteer or somebody.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 3, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill, as amended, be reported to the House.

House resumed.

Bill reported, with amendment, read the third time and passed.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL

Order for second reading read.

The Minister of Tourism (Dr. The Hon. Adesh Nanan): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to amend various Acts, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, governments around the world are recognizing that tourism is an export industry that generates foreign exchange, creates jobs and encourages economic diversification. Named the world's fastest and largest growing industry, tourism is moving rapidly into the mainstream of economic development tools that governments are seeking to use to reduce their country's dependency on traditional industries.

The Bill before the House this afternoon makes reference to consequential amendments to the Tourism Development Act, 2000. This Act was assented to on June 1, 2000. This Bill seeks to enact legislation relating to consequential amendments to relate to other Acts arising from the new tourism legislation, that is, the Tourism Development Act, 2000.

Section 1(2) of the Tourism Development Act, 2000 provides that:

“This Act shall come into operation on such date as the President may appoint by Proclamation.”

However, a prerequisite is that certain consequential amendments to other pieces of legislation shall be made. Members are reminded that upon proclamation of the Tourism Development Act, the existing Hotel Development Act of 1963 will be repealed.

This Bill incorporates amendments to certain Acts as follows. The Income Tax Act and Miscellaneous Taxes Act. Amendments are being effected to the

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Income Tax Act, Chap. 75:01 and the Miscellaneous Taxes Act, Chap. 77:01 such that references to the Hotel Development Act are replaced by the words “Tourism Development Act, 2000”.

3.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in light of the fact that the Tourism Development Act provides tax concessions for an approved tourism project and not only to an approved hotel, as pertains under the existing Hotel Development Act, the Corporation Tax Act Chap. 75:02 must provide for exemption from taxes of gains and profits for an approved tourism project.

Section 6 of the Tourism Development Act, 2000 has introduced a new tax called a Tourism Project Transfer Tax, which is intended to serve as a penalty for entrepreneurs who have been found to contravene the conditions governing the approval of tourism incentives granted under the Tourism Development Act.

Mr. Speaker, the Tourism Project Transfer Tax would be payable by the vender. The intention is that where such a tax is imposed, there would be a waiver of stamp duty normally paid by the purchaser of a property in respect of conveyance or sale under the Stamp Duty Act.

In order to give effect to this new provision, an amendment must be made to the Stamp Duty Act Chap. 76:01 to exempt from the payment of stamp duty instruments made for the purposes of or in connection with the transfer of a tourism project referred to in section 6 of the Tourism Development Act. In addition, a subsection needs to be included at section 6 of the Tourism Development Act to make it clear that where a Tourism Project Transfer Tax is paid, stamp duty would be waived.

Mr. Speaker, these are simply amendments to the various Acts which are required to facilitate the proclamation of the Tourism Development Act. The other requirement for the proclamation of the Act is the finalization of regulations to the Act, and in this regard regulations have been drafted for eventual approval by the President of the Republic. These are the amendments that are before the House.

I thank you, and I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

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House in Committee.

Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be reported to the House.

House resumed.

Bill reported, without amendment, read the third time and passed.

EDUCATION (LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD) REGULATIONS

The Minister of Education (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move Motion No. 1 under Government Business:

Whereas it is provided by subsection (1) of section 86 of the Education Act, Chap. 39:01 (hereinafter referred to as “the Act”) that the Minister may make Regulations generally for the purpose of carrying the Act into effect and in particular for prescribing anything that is, by the Act, required to be prescribed;

And Whereas it is provided by subsection (2) of section 86 that Regulations made with respect to section 23 shall be subject to affirmative resolution of Parliament;

And Whereas the Minister has on the 28th July, 2000 made the Education (Local School Board) Regulations, 2000;

And Whereas it is expedient that the Regulations now be affirmed;

Be it resolved that the Education (Local School Board) Regulations, 2000 be approved.

Mr. Speaker, the Education (Amdt.) Bill which gave life to these regulations was first debated in this House in January of this year. Debate in the Senate thereafter began in March 2000 and was completed in May 2000. These regulations were previously before this honourable Chamber and much discussion ensued because the actual substantive provisions in the amending Act were very minor. In fact, the meat on the skeleton came from the draft regulations which were then circulated in January.

During the debates in this House in January, and thereafter the Senate in March and May, concerns were voiced in relation to the draft regulations that we had at that time. So we took the ideas, concerns and criticisms on board, where possible, and made amendments to the regulations, which are now in the form that they are before this Chamber. It is important to note that we took as far as we

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could suggestions that were made in both Chambers in order to come up with the present regulations.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the former Minister of Education, Dr. The Hon. Adesh Nanan, for his work in the formation stages of these regulations, and that is the work that I am completing by bringing the regulations for affirmation here today. [*Interruption*] We will eventually. [*Laughter*] You would be very surprised.

Mr. Speaker, the regulations themselves are very straightforward, self-explanatory. The intent is clearly to have members in a particular community participate in, direct and assist in the running of schools within their communities. Whereas the church schools and the assisted schools have school boards, the government schools do not have school boards, and so the intention of these regulations was for having, in effect, a board of management, local school board, for the management of government schools.

In regulation 3 it states that the board shall comprise—

- “(a) the Principal who is an *ex officio* member; and
- (b) no more than nine other members drawn from among the following groups, namely:
 - (i) a member of the school staff other than the Principal;
 - (ii) a member of the union most representative of teachers nominated by the union;”

So there would be principal and teacher representation on the board.

- “(iii) two members of the recognised Parent-Teacher Association...nominated by the members of that Association, at least one of whom must be a female;”

So the PTA as well would be involved on the board.

- “(iv) a representative of the past pupils’ association, if any, of the school nominated by that association;
- (v) a member of the student body;
- (vi) three persons nominated by the Minister as he deems necessary after consultation with the relevant interest groups and stakeholders within the Community in which the school is located.”

Clearly it is envisaged that there would be a spread of personnel: principal, teachers, parents and students as well as persons with particular expertise from the community to assist in the management of schools in their particular area.

In regulation 3 it also states:

“The Board shall appoint from its membership, persons, other than the Principal, staff or student representative to be the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman.”

This is to avoid a principal having total domination of the board, so that another person apart from the principal would be chairman and vice-chairman.

The term of the board would be for two years and, thereafter, the regulations talk about appointment and termination of appointments, ordinary meetings and procedures of the board, and then, what is most important, within it would be the duties and powers of the board as set out in Part III of the regulations.

Regulation 18 sets out the duties and powers, including but not limited to those listed hereunder, to manage the school:

- “(a) in the development of a strategic plan for the school plant;
- (b) in the conduct of an operational and environmental audit of the activities of the school;
- (c) in the development and implementation of school improvement plans;
- (d) by receiving information, complaints and expressions of concern and hope from the public concerning the school and its members, and to make recommendations as they see fit and relay them to the competent authority;
- (e) by encouraging, promoting, sustaining and fostering mutual understanding, good fellowship and co-operation among the Minister, staff, parents, pupils and other persons associated with the school;
- (f) by requesting the assistance of local government bodies and other agencies and departments to assist in the maintenance of the school;
- (g) by liaising with all relevant agencies in order to ensure that the school is adequately served with water and electricity and sanitation services.”

Mr. Speaker, the regulations continue, so that the local school board can have an input into the management in terms of the physical structure and the development of a particular school.

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A lot of debate had ensued on this originally, as I said before, in January when it was before this Chamber. We have taken those concerns on board, the rest of it is self-explanatory and we await the comments of the hon. Members on the other side. At that time when the debate took place in this Chamber, the draft regulations were attached. The Bill was supported by Members and I look forward to their comments and, certainly, to their support so we can put this measure into effect.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you, and I beg to move.

Question proposed.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds (*Laventille East/Morvant*): Mr. Speaker, the regulations that are being proposed by the Minister, just like the substantive debate on the introduction of the local school boards, the amendment to the Education Act raises some concerns for us on this side.

Since the debate, the Government in its effort to be populist as it scrambled around for places in which to put some of the children after their Common Entrance Examination, decided that it would cause some of those children to go, as children did for many years in this country, to private secondary schools, the only difference being that the Government now pays the cost of that tuition. So first off, I want to tell the Minister for her own benefit that when she and the Prime Minister and, as the Attorney General said in this Parliament today in another debate—assert that 10,000 children fall by the wayside, that is not correct because they know full well that of the 10,000 of whom they speak, some of those children always went to private secondary schools. The only difference now is that, at this stage, the Government now pays for that tuition, because these private secondary schools were filled year after year.

We want to assert in response that the Minister ought to lead the way in this important debate and let this country know that the figure which the Prime Minister plucked out of the hat is just not true. [*Desk thumping*] While I am on that, for the Minister's edification, I want to remind her as well that of the 10,000 children of whom she speaks very glibly along with the Prime Minister, many of them repeated the Common Entrance Examination. I myself not having done well in my first attempt at Common Entrance had the benefit of a repeat, so if she was misinformed, she is now no longer ignorant, she knows the facts and if she was attempting to mislead us, we have seen through it in the spirit of transparency.

Mr. Speaker, this raises other concerns, as I have indicated, because now that they have caused the state to pay for this private tuition, we have a definition in the preliminary section here which says:

“‘Government School’ means a school within the meaning of section 11(4) of the Act;”

When one looks at section 11(4) of the Act, it says:

“(4) A Government school is a public school wholly owned by the Government.”

So if we are to introduce boards, and presumably these private secondary schools for which the state is now paying the tuition cost are to be included and befitted with school boards, I want to know whether the Minister considers that these private schools are now government schools within the meaning of section 11(4). Of course, if the Minister had gone beyond section 11(4) she would have seen another subsection, 11(6) which says:

“(6) A private school is a school provided and maintained by some person or authority other than the Government.”

So there is a clear distinction in the legislation between a government school and a private school and this is something that may have escaped the attention of the Minister or her advisers and we want her to either set the record straight or correct that because we on this side realize that the business of education is a very serious one and we are not playing games with it. It is the bedrock upon which the nation must be built. Whilst we acknowledge that over the years, certain difficulties have arisen in respect of the education system, our business is to correct it and we will support the Government in correcting it, but we will not stand silently and tolerate the misleading of the people of this country for political purposes. We cannot do that. [*Desk thumping*]

This has arisen because quite apart from political expediency—because one can be politically expedient, but one must demonstrate an understanding of the education function. Recently there was a debate on a motion “What is education and what is education for” in the other place by Sen. Prof. Ramchand. The Minister went into that debate and two things characterized her presentation because I took the time to obtain a copy of *Hansard* and to study her words very carefully. Of course, there was not much to study and my task was easy indeed because she said nothing new, nothing novel and she gave no indication that she had a grasp of what education is and what it is for.

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I do not mean to demean the Minister, but at the end of my reading, I was actually startled at the fact that this Minister of Education, who joins with her Prime Minister and her Government and claims to have effected a revolution in education in this country, was unable to demonstrate in her long-winded, empty contribution a full understanding of what education was about for Trinidad and Tobago, or indeed at all, and I dare her, her colleagues or any person in this country to read her contribution and come up with a conclusion separate or distinct from the one I have come to. It was empty. Clearly, the Minister never took time to understand and, therefore, one could appreciate why she and her Prime Minister have come up short in their false claims about some education revolution in this country.

When we try to impose school boards, Mr. Speaker, and I use the word “impose” in its softest context, I do not mean it is a *dictat* from the Government, I mean to establish school boards for the management of schools. I am not ashamed to say, and I say it with the highest measure of pride because it has become fashionable for the Government now to say all the PNM does is to say that we “woulda”, “coulda” and “shoulda”, that we were doing this and we were doing that as if nothing was ever done in this country prior to 1995. It is as if when they came they met bush and jungle and wild animals, and Port of Spain was flat, there was nothing and this UNC Government created everything under the sun. It would not surprise me if the Prime Minister shortly claims to be the person responsible for the emancipation of those who were emancipated in this country. Everything! When we remind them sensibly that it is we who established many of the things that they are now charged with the responsibility as a government of continuing and of building, they run to that old beaten track, everything was in the pipeline, the PNM did nothing.

Mr. Speaker, when we tried to put in place these boards, we, in the course of the debate told them—and they always say they are willing to hear our contribution—that in respect of the constitution or the composition of the school boards that the composition of the board is the principal of the school who is an *ex officio* member. That implies that he cannot vote, he participates.

Clause 3(1) (b) says:

“(b) no more than nine other members drawn from among the following groups, namely:

- (i) a member of the school staff other than the Principal;

We know that staff includes teaching staff and other staff, there are cleaning staff and so forth, but presumably they mean teaching staff. So the principal is an *ex officio* member, but you have a teacher who is a member of the board who can very well emerge as the chairperson or the leader of that board, and there will be a position where the principal—and I was making the point that it was in the PNM's policy paper and they expressly said that they have accepted it as their own policy, though they have not practised it and have corrupted it, and I use the word "corrupt" not in the usual sense, but in the looser sense. They spoil it, adulterated it, to use a more appropriate term. As they seek to do that, we told them in the course of the debate that it was dangerous because the principal may have a different view, for we are moving towards school-based management. This is where the management of the school and the school board became important because we are moving from the centralized system to school-based management.

The Attorney General in another debate today was arguing that they have decentralized the process for registration for birth certificates, and he told us expressly that it existed all along, and all he has done new was to decentralize it by setting up offices in different parts of the country. He has a big announcement, a big launch and invites all Members of Parliament. If we are going to school-based management now, why the Minister does not have a big launch too and send us all invitations? Of course we would not attend, because we know she would be wasting our time. The only difference between this and the one with the Attorney General is that his is more treacherous in this election season, but we are attending to it.

Mr. Speaker, it is about school-based management, but here you have a situation where the principal may have one view on a particular policy matter or the direction for his school, but he finds himself sitting as an *ex officio* member on a board with a teacher, his junior, who has a totally different view and telling the board it must go in this direction, getting support from the board, and the principal can say or do nothing about it. We told them about that. That will interfere, it may be counter-productive, so all we recommended in the debate was to rearrange the composition of the board to avoid the potential for that sort of problem, but she comes glibly and says: "We are awaiting the comments of the other side." And the Attorney General told us before the real thing with this Government is, we could talk until we get red in the face, blue in the face, black in the face, and you know what? Nothing.

This Bill does not require any specified majority, these regulations do not require that, and all we can do is go on record as saying we told you and we will

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tell you again. We also told them in the substantive debate that since they were talking about decentralization, there is a role for the regional corporations in terms of the school because this Government, under the present Minister of Local Government gave instructions to the administrative arm of some of the regional corporations, including the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation that they conduct repairs on schools and the Port of Spain Corporation as well. So they understand the importance of the need for local government, but yet when it comes to the management of the thing and membership on the very board, there is no mention of that. We told them so in the debate and the regulations have come before us today with no mention of that again, and yet she tells us lyingly and glibly that she is willing to hear what we have to say. But we could talk and talk, once it is not written in the books as unlawful, they go ahead and do it. But the people will be judging you very soon, so we are not worried, and the people you talk about feel insulted.

We are putting in school boards. I have no doubt that the Port of Spain Model School will have a school board too. I think the Minister should be the principal and the chairperson of the board. She should be everything in her model school, because she, her Prime Minister and the Government came to this country after the Common Entrance Examination, and the Prime Minister in a statement delivered to this honourable House on July 14, 2000, among the other things that he so wonderfully said, though incorrectly and deceitfully, was: “Now universal free secondary education is a reality,” implying that it was not so. The use of the word “now” implies it was not so before. What free education? What universal education? They were going to be putting a school board, no doubt, in place at the model school. What universal education?

4.15 p.m.

The Minister in the Senate, to which I made reference a while ago—in response to a question during her contribution, from the said Prof. Ramchand, who got up and said:

“Mr. President, for clarification, thank you Madam Minister. I wonder if the Minister is in a position to tell the Senate how the model school differs from Government five-year schools or Junior Secondary schools?”

This is the Minister's reply:

“I was coming to that. In fact, I was first explaining why the Government placed students in the model school and in the form one specials. I am asking you to remember—and do not just say the model school is on its own, in the

form one specials the students are in this kind of range. There are students who got below 30 per cent...Do you know what people are saying? Why I am putting them there?"

Then she said:

"Leave approximately 2,600 children in the primary schools? So, where is the Government going to get places in the primary schools? There are others who are coming in. Where am I going to get places? The Government must bite the bullet; the Government must face the reality."

That was the true reason for what they did! It was not about universal education, and the Minister understood that very well, because the Minister, in another part of her contribution, actually said, and I quote,

"Some people ask me if it is only in Port of Spain there are children who did not perform the same as others. No. It is throughout the country, so when you are talking about the model schools, talk about the form one specials."

The Minister is here telling us for the first time, because she was pressed by Prof. Ramchand, that the form one specials are not secondary school form ones.

So, when the Prime Minister comes and talks about universal secondary education being introduced for the first time, he is saying it against the background of the fact that his Minister of Education is admitting to the population that the form one specials, into which plenty of these children went, are not really secondary school classes. She knew, and he ought to have known, that the concept of universal secondary education cannot and does not apply. If the form one specials are not, in fact, secondary schools, but it is another post-primary situation in another place by another name—*[Desk thumping]*

Nothing more than that, but in typical UNC style, an attempt to deceive the population. As I promised you, time and time again, as long as God gives me strength, as long as God gives me PNM power and PNM vitality, I will expose you every minute of the day. *[Desk thumping]*

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Manning: All your business exposed!

Mr. F. Hinds: All your business exposed, and you must now get up when you speak in this debate and admit you were misleading the country and the Prime Minister was misleading the country, and you should apologize and take back the words "universal secondary education".

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: I want to state categorically that at no time did I mislead my Prime Minister or any person in this country with respect to the matter under discussion.

Mr. F. Hinds: It is the same way she told us she would listen to our comments and make the necessary adjustments, and she came back with the same things. We know what she means. Doublespeak, UNC, we understand that. Shortly, not only about Arima and Point Fortin, we will be saying, may the souls of the faithfully departed—even the unfaithful—rest in peace, Amen. Shortly! Even the unfaithful! *[Laughter]* *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we had a situation where—and you know, there is a psychological matter to be addressed here. In respect of these model schools, the Minister does not understand when one establishes—she admitted that all of the form one specials across the country are, in fact, model schools, because these are children, from her statistics coming out of the Ministry, who did between zero per cent and 30 per cent in the essay writing aspect; and between 0 per cent and 30 per cent of the mathematics component. We told her to stop misleading the country, stop saying PNM caused 10,000 children to fail every year! She got up here and said that over the last 10 years, 100,000 children were by the wayside. Not true! *[Desk thumping]* I was one of those who did not pass the Common Entrance Examination, and I “ain't by no wayside”! Thank God for Eric Williams and the PNM today! *[Desk thumping]*

Of course that was a bit more than 10 years ago, but there are others who benefited from the long, outstanding contribution of the PNM in education who benefited just like me; and you are talking about you introduced free education. I did not pay one cent for it! I regret today that I wasted opportunity in my first attempt at Common Entrance, but when I was a boy, I behaved like that. Now they are men and women, and they still behave like that! *[Desk thumping]* *[Laughter]*

“Long time”, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there used to be a dunce class in primary school. It was a sad thing but it was a reality. We did not understand in those antiquated times that children had so-called learning difficulties. This is why I want to tell the Minister that shoving the children in private school “on top club”, “downstairs rum shop”, does not resolve the problem. The task force papers envisage a rearrangement of the primary school teaching system. That is the idea! That is the problem!

When they say PNM had things in the pipeline and we did not bring it for five years, we did not do it since 1992, the reason we did not do it is because we are

responsible and we realized the basic elements were not yet in place. We are not making any half-baked cake in this country. When we do it, we do it PNM style, and we do it real good. *[Desk thumping]* We do not sacrifice efficiency for speed and expediency, because we have been here a long time and we will be here for a long time to come.

They are like a flash in the pan, overnight and they will be gone shortly, forever. Here today, gone tomorrow. We know we have to account to the people of this country for the next 100 years, so what we do now, we make sure and do it good. *[Laughter]* Understand that!

There used to be dunce classes “long time”, and what we did in our ignorance was to label children. There used to be a special class for dunce children. We did not understand that they had natural learning difficulties. So, of the 10,000 children, the statistics from the Minister's ministry show that on average, at least in 1998, 94 per cent of the 10,000 children who did not get a place either went to private secondary schools, repeated the exam or went to a post-primary system.

It is only six per cent of those who did not find any place, and those were the ones who had learning difficulties who needed the concept of the model school. That is it! After that, we had technical training up and down the country, and we had youth camps which they have obliterated from the face of this country. *[Desk thumping]* So, those 6 per cent now have no chance! You see, they have established the model school. They gave me with one hand and then they took back with four.

Where are my youth camps? Where is my dwindling YTEPP? What about my dwindling Civilian Conservation Corps? What about my dwindling on-the-job training programme? They wiped them away and then they come with a school for two hundred and sixty-something children, a Port of Spain Model School, and form one specials that she pretended were secondary schools.

If you take time, Madam Minister, I have taken the time to get a document on the United Kingdom's education policy, the German education policy, the United States' education policy, and I have done comparisons. We are moving from a situation now where we must label children. For the rest of their time, people will be telling them in our culture, “You are a *Chicken Licken* child.”

Talking about *Chicken Licken* child, there are two things I want to say. We have been careful in this debate—my political leader, the Member for San Fernando East, and all the PNM spokespeople. We are mindful that at the end of the day, notwithstanding their inefficiencies and their iniquities and their

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misunderstanding of the education function and portfolio, it is not they who will suffer. It is those children. We were careful during the course of the debate not to knock the children.

We saw the Minister grappling with the trouble. Every time she wanted to use the word “failure” in the debate in the Senate, she said “children who did not do the same as others”. A euphemism for failure. We understand and we respect that.

On the question of *Chicken Licken*, I want her to understand, and this is not my thought. This is a thought that came from a very concerned person—who wrote an open letter to the Minister—by the name of Denise Maria Young, a special education teacher. She said a number of very useful things in the *Express* of Monday, August 7, 2000.

She said that, from her own experience as a special education teacher, she has found that the learning disabled teenager does not want to read books like *Jack and the Beanstalk* or *Chicken Licken* or the *Ugly Duckling*. She asks:

“Would you struggle through a long boring movie for two hours, if you already knew the plot and the ending? They also find it insulting and degrading to read such ‘baby’ books.

In selecting reading materials for teenagers, books must not only be at their reading level but also at their interest level.”

You are saying that they cannot read, Madam Minister, but you just organized the model school without—you published a list of 50 books without finding out what were their special needs. [*Desk thumping*] Now you are going to test them! They should have been tested before. Their needs should have been analyzed before, and then come with the books, but she was being expedient, so she did not take time to deal with those details.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: We have to do it when we can. Now! You never did it!

Mr. F. Hinds: Books must be at their reading level and their interest level, because they already know the plot in the *Ugly Duckling* “long time”, and *Jack and the Beanstalk*. That will not attract their interest. She wants to go to Diego Martin, but she is in a Siparia taxi! She could go, but leave the children of this nation in peace!

She advises, if you did not know:

“Publishers in the United States and England—”

I have no doubt. I can add for my own part, even locally.

“are more than willing to provide samples of their products.”

And she can purchase them. She can send for the experts, let them come, because this Government has no problem with money whatsoever.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting is suspended for half an hour.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.02 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I was making the point before we took the break that the Government is not able to plead incapacity in terms of resources because in the very education sector, we saw recently, by way of a hard position that was advanced to the Cabinet by the Minister of Education, that the 10 schools that the Minister promised would alleviate the problems and advance this country towards universal education. In fact, she knows and the Government knows that both the 1992 Task Force which was commissioned by the PNM under the Member for San Fernando East as he was then the Prime Minister, and the 1998 Task Force which was commissioned by the present Prime Minister and chaired by a former Education Minister, recognized that we needed to construct another 21 secondary schools in order to de-shift the junior secondary schools and send all the children into secondary schools, *per se*. [*Interruption*] Thank you very much—32.

Mr. Speaker, the Government, against that background, promised 10 new schools, one-third the amount, by September. That objective is under doubt because we know the Minister has said there will be hiccups and glitches and we may not have all at the opening of the new term but logic, again, compels us to accept that if you needed 32 new schools in order to achieve the de-shifting of the junior secondary schools and sending all the children into secondary schools proper, and you were only coming up with one-third, then the goal of universal education from that standpoint is not to be achieved just yet.

Yet, on that definition, they continue to talk about universal secondary education but we saw where for these 10 schools, the original budget was \$138 million and they all know of it. It appeared before them in the Cabinet and they agreed that the budget has gone to \$243 million in less than nine months and we

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are advised that in order to justify that, the Prime Minister said it was not the Government's fault but that the architects increased the size of the schools. So, you increase the size of 10 schools and you wind up with a budget of over \$100 million overrun. We are still not sure to get the 10 schools.

This Government is very able in financial terms. Today, we heard that \$69 million was a gift to a certain private institution and we have a host of other examples of government mismanagement, misspending of public money and this is why we had to tell them that the Central Bank statistics revealed that this Government had expended—actual expenditure, that is—\$59 billion over its term in Government so far and we do not know what they can show us for it. Yet, they talk every day and in all their cottage meetings and whenever they have a chance here, about the PNM spent \$60 billion over 30 years' oil revenues.

Mr. Partap: And you cannot get water.

Mr. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, the public will judge.

The point here is, recently we saw because of the Government's ineptitude and the Minister's lack of understanding of how the system works and her uncaring spirit and attitude, that she found herself in a confrontation with principals in this country because when children went to be registered for the form one specials and their secondary school places proper, they were met with requests and, in some cases, firm requests, from the schools, to pay varying registration fees. The principals were told by the ministry that it is illegal and wrong for them to so collect and that, in principle, is quite right. We will not, as a responsible Opposition, with the experience of governance in this country, encourage any illegality. But, what is the reality?

We know and we cannot turn away from the fact, just by way of an example, there are some places in this country where commuters would never get home or get to work had it not been for “PH” drivers, but “pulling bull” is illegal. We understand that. That is a social reality we must try to grapple with. How do we do that? By encouraging registration of taxis and providing the wherewithal for people to register and run a proper taxi service, rather than run a “PH” operation.

The Government is criticizing the principals but the reality is that in the absence of principals raking and scraping money from wherever they could get it, in fact, many schools have become professional fund-raisers. My own son went to a school where, I mean, almost on a weekly basis, my wife and I had to find \$20 or \$40 for barbecue tickets and various things. I am sure all of us as parents would have experienced that. We do it sometimes even grudgingly, but we do it because

we understand that it is necessary, knowing full well that the schools are not being financed to buy chalk, dusters and a number of other things they need in order to run a proper operation. I see the Minister smiling and I can hear her, “That did not begin in 1995. That was so for many years.”

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Exactly.

Mr. F. Hinds: She is probably quite right but we come right back to the position that I have espoused on many occasions in this honourable Chamber. Being ignorant may not be your fault, but remaining ignorant certainly is.

Dr. Mohammed: Speak for yourself.

Mr. F. Hinds: You are guilty as could be because previous governments were not able, given their current economic circumstances. The 1991—1995 PNM government had to rebuild the entire economy and it did.

Miss Nicholson: Do not say that.

Mr. F. Hinds: But, more to the point, this Government cannot claim to be unable to afford anything. It has found \$300 million for electricity that we never needed. It jumped a budget from \$138 million to \$243 million, as I have said. The airport budget jumped from \$400 million to \$1,200 million. It spent \$75 million just so, as a gift to an insurance company. We heard about that here today. This Government is very able to find money for its friends and itself when it pleases to, so no school in this country ought to be without duster, chalk and toilet paper. None. [*Desk thumping*]

If you do not want the principals collecting money, take a little bit out of the misspending and buy chalk, dusters and other things that the teachers need. The Minister found money to get more teachers to deal with the new intake. She promised there was a waiting list of applicants and she found money to hire them. She said that the Teaching Service Commission was hiring more and they would pay them more but she has not found money to improve the current teachers' salaries. She does not understand that the morale of the teachers in the system is particularly low and money would not improve morale but money would go a long way, the teachers say, but that is another matter.

In respect of the private schools that these regulations seem to touch upon—because I had raised the question about the school boards as they apply to the private schools. Many of the private secondary schools—and some of them did an excellent job by way of teaching and preparing children for GCE in this country; there is no doubt about that. What is unfortunate is that the Government clearly

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did not take the time to investigate. It could not, because its plan to shove all the children somewhere was an overnight plan, an overnight expediency effort, but they never took time to find out what were the management structures in those private institutions.

Are they staffed with trained and able people? Are these schools located on top rum shops or downstairs hardware? These are the sorts of things because when these private institutions were established, many of them would have done so on the basis of commercial considerations for profit. If I could run a school where the rent was \$500 a month, upstairs a rum shop, it suits me fine but when we talk about standards in this country, they took no time to investigate these issues hence the reason we ended up with the kinds of locations that we have.

More than that, some of these schools are three-room operations, so while you take a batch in 2000 for the first year, when they are ready to move on to the second year, it might be all right if it is a three-room operation. When they, the first-year students, go on to the third year, after a while you start having a problem because where will you put the fourth-year group? What will happen with the new batch in four years' time, and so forth, is that you hope that these schools will, in the interim, be able to relocate themselves.

Mr. Speaker, we now find ourselves with a private schools association, something like that, something we never had before but they realize they are in a strong bargaining position so they formed themselves into an association and they are now calling on the Minister and the Government to tell them the terms of these contracts. It appears to us—and I have filed an appropriate question that I know the Minister will be obliged to answer: What are the terms and conditions that the Government has entered into with these private institutions to house these students? We have no idea. Because it was an overnight plan, they just rushed in. No contracts, no proper arrangements, nothing—that is what this Government is calling universal and free education—trying to fool people.

Mr. Speaker, all these things, we remind the Government and we maintain our position; we subscribe wholly to the goal of universal education. We said so a long time ago, as early as 1961. But if a man is earning \$1,500 a month, he ought not to live on a budget of \$2,000 a month.

5.15 p.m.

While the goal was universal education, we the PNM took our time and improved schools and built new schools as we went along. We accelerated the school building programme after 1975 when we got an increase in revenue. You

are building 10 schools and you make a song and dance about it. We built 81 secondary schools in this country and—[*Interruption*—I am sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for Laventille East/Morvant has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Mrs. C. Robinson-Regis*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. F. Hinds: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and hon. Members. I am really gratified at your extension because I am taking this opportunity to educate the Minister of Education, so that she would no longer say the things that she and her Prime Minister have been saying.

Regarding one of those things—and I heard the tape over and over again on 102FM—I could hear the Prime Minister now and I quote, “No longer would any child be denied a place in a secondary school because of his race, his sex or religion,” implying in that very sly comment, to the unwary and unwatchful souls, that hitherto children were denied places for those reasons. The Prime Minister's daughter went to St. Joseph's Convent, a Catholic school, and the Prime Minister or the Minister of Education cannot show me a single school in this country where you only have Indians, only have Africans or only have Chinese! They cannot show me one school in this country where you only have Hindus, Christians, Muslims or Presbyterians. In all those schools you have a mix, larger or greater, but you have a mix. [*Desk thumping*]

Yet the Prime Minister is telling this country, “No longer will any child be denied a place,” trying to give the impression that the PNM did that. They are too wicked, and to call back the words of George Chambers, “not a seat for them!” None! [*Desk thumping*] I am so sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I do think that we need to get back to the regulations. I have sat and I have listened and I do think that we are discussing lots of issues, education yes, but education that has nothing to do with what is immediately before us. Could you please return to it.

Mr. F. Hinds: I am most grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, and I am guided. I agree entirely with you.

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Insofar as the regulations are concerned, with respect to regulation 5(3)—
[*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*—it states:

“The Minister may revoke the appointment of a member, other than the Principal, where—

- (a) he is absent without leave from the Chairman for three consecutive meetings of the Board;
- (b) he is adjudicated to be bankrupt;
- (c) he is convicted of a criminal offence;”

Well, I could understand why the Government would put that provision, because it is a school board. We understand the view that a person is not guilty until so proved, but in the context of a school board and dealing with our nation's children, I am a bit concerned.

There are cases where people—I practise in the courts and I have seen and I know of cases where the jury for various reasons did not find guilt in a particular case. That does not necessarily mean the offence was not committed. It does not necessarily mean that it was committed by the person charged for the offence, but you may find sometimes that the prosecution may come up short with some technical aspect of the evidence, and there are various other reasons. The state can enter a *nolle prosequi*, and there are various other reasons. There may, for example, be an amnesty, and we know the effects of that in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*] I have nothing to say about that.

It may be that we may want to go a little further than requiring a firm conviction, because a man may—let me not speak about this even in general terms—but I think we should go a bit beyond that. I am only making a suggestion. The Attorney General is here, the Minister can have a word with him. I am sure that she has grasped the point that I have tried to make and I hope that he may give thought to what I have just suggested in the context of a school board and in those general circumstances. [*Interruption*]

Well a Member who is not speaking—I will ask, and the Minister might address this through me. The question is: When you have the school board in place, who will actually manage the school? Naturally, we think it is the principal, but when you read of the duties and powers of the board, you will see that—and I had said so in the debate—some of these duties and powers of the board go well into the functions of even the Ministry of Education.

Take for example:

- “(a) in the development of a strategic plan for the school plant;
- (b) in the conduct of operational and environmental audit of the activities of the school;”

We had said during the debate that some of these functions—*[Interruption]*—there was a particular one—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: We have removed that one.

Mr. F. Hinds: That is commendable. You decided to let good sense prevail.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: I told you that we would take some of the suggestions.

Mr. F. Hinds: You will take some, oh, yes; because there was, indeed, in the debate a particular clause, and I had spoken about it, a particular duty which allowed the school board to get into the realm of curriculum development and all those things, on the basis of it. I am happy to see that it was “delated”. I am delighted that it was “delated”, but I am absolutely saddened—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Members: Deleted!

Mr. F. Hinds: That is quite all right, my name is not—I mean, I am not the Member for St. Joseph you know; do not hold it against me. I say “delated”, I have heard it pronounced that way before, and I have heard some people say deleted. *[Crosstalk]* I can spell it. *[Laughter]* But I will not be detracted. Mr. Speaker, we are trying to keep the order of the House and the Members are urging me not to do so.

As we approach implanting these school boards and the important concept of school-based management, as we decentralize authority and planning from the Ministry of Education, as is the direction the world is taking, we are not at all happy with the way the Government has handled the education portfolio in this country. They have aborted, if you like, a good thing. Everything was on course until the coming of this Minister—well, no, the previous Minister—*[Laughter]*—and the UNC. *[Interruption]*

One of my colleagues, the Member for San Fernando West, reminded me of a very important point. This Government, as all governments, according to the Concordat and established arrangements, carry a duty to fund, in part, the denominational schools and their operation. This Government is very guilty of

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being absolutely delinquent in terms of that funding. We have heard quarrels from these schools. We know that they are not doing it; the repair programme has been late for years. The Minister, the Member for Tabaquite, has had to apologize to us on several occasions, and the same continues.

When the Government is delinquent in that sense, and not funding these schools, what do we expect now in relation to the private school? Probably this explains why they have not sought and put in place—at least, up to when the principals complained—written contracts, because they know they would get sued. This raises yet another question. What would the relationship really be with these private schools if they have contracts with the Government, the Ministry of Education, as opposed to the assisted schools?

If you fall short with the assisted schools they grumble and the children suffer, as you boast about universal education, but when you breach your duty in respect of private contracts you will get sued, and we need to watch that. What do we expect of the Government when it is not taking care of its own, the assisted schools? The day you fall short with paying the fees for these students in the private schools, the principals would eject these students, because their parent, the Government, is not paying the fees. All these matters seem to leave the Minister nonplussed.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: No, I would speak in due course.

Mr. F. Hinds: She seemed absolutely at a loss, but that does not surprise us. I simply want to base my suggestion that she is at a loss on that contribution she made in the Senate recently, and I will deal with that at the right time.

Mr. Speaker, with those very few words—[*Interruption*]*—*you can call them empty. I hope that the Government will take heed and do it, not in the interest of the People's National Movement—we will be all right; we have been here, we are here and we will be here for a long time—but do it in the interest of those children who look to you now for leadership; look to you for guidance henceforth.

Education is the window to the future. It is an important function with which you, Madam Minister, have been entrusted, and so far your record leaves some questions to be asked. I urge you to improve that and come straight to the people of Trinidad and Tobago in their own and deserving interest.

I wish to thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kenneth Valley (*Diego Martin Central*): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make just a few observations with respect to the local school board regulations.

The first thing one notices, again—one sees what appears to be an *ad hoc* approach to governmental activity. One would have thought that if the Government is moving to have local school boards, that it would have seen the importance of having the local government bodies involved.

One notes that in (f), in terms of clause 18 of the legislation, that they want the local government bodies to be there to assist in the maintenance of the schools and so forth. But in terms of setting up the board, one notes a conspicuous absence of local government bodies' involvement. It would seem to me that if one were to look at the regional corporations and if we view what is happening, the importance of communities and so forth, one would want to have local government bodies to see about the government schools, even the police stations, seeing about the repairs.

To do that one cannot simply say that you would do so, get them involved. They are the representatives of the local area, and I think they ought to have the authority to nominate, at least, one member.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: You want a politician on the board?

Mr. K. Valley: It does not have to be. It can be a representative, but the person could be nominated by the regional corporation. You can say, specifically, “not a member of council”; you can say that. Here you are talking about the communities and so forth, and they are working in the communities. I think you would want to have them as a member of the school board. If you want to say that the person nominated must not be a member of council, that is fine—I do not know why you would want to say that—but if you want to, that is fine. That is the first issue.

If we think through this, we would see the importance of having that nexus between the regional corporation and the local school boards.

5.30 p.m.

Secondly, the legislation provides for these school boards only in government schools and I think the point raised by my colleague, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant is important. If we are now going to be sending our students to these private schools, should we have as a requirement to qualify that they ought to have school boards? If they are saying that school boards are good things to help in the development of schools and help in the curriculum and strategic plans and so forth, should we not have some level of control for those schools if we are concerned?

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Mr. Speaker, like my colleague, I am not convinced that whole effort with respect to the Government's universal secondary education concept has been fully thought out, and one can say why there is no requirement for these schools to have school boards, and I think my colleague made the point in a different way.

There are two issues, one is that it is not a fact that 10,000 students are on the streets after the Common Entrance Examination because most of those students, about 50 per cent would have had a second opportunity. More importantly, if in fact the Government attempts to place all 10,000 students this year we see right away that there is a wastage of funds because as I said, roughly 50 per cent of those students would have had a second opportunity. Are we talking about placing students who did not have another opportunity, or are we talking about all those who were not placed after the Common Entrance Examination?

Mr. Speaker, as a fact, you would know that it is cheaper per student at the primary level than at the secondary level, so if in fact the students had a second chance, it would seem to me that they should have been left in the primary school to have that second opportunity. [*Crosstalk*]

What do you mean there is no second chance? Up to now there is a second chance. In other words it is 11-plus and 12-plus and when you are saying that option is available—[*Interruption*] No, no, the Government has to be concerned with how it spends taxpayers' money.

Mr. Speaker, the point is simple. The child has an opportunity to write the Common Entrance Examination at 11-plus and another opportunity at 12-plus. If, for whatever reason the child is not placed after writing the examination on the first occasion, he has a second chance. My question is: Are we placing all 10,000 this year? If so, you are then placing some 11-plus students who have a second opportunity, and if you are doing that, you are wasting taxpayers' money because those 11-plus students should remain in the primary school to do the examination again. That is one issue. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, you are wasting money because the cost involved on an incremental basis shows that it is cheaper at the primary level than at the secondary level. [*Desk thumping*] And you are also denying the child who might be a late developer to get higher marks and go to a much better school. Most students at their second opportunity would score much higher. So rather than sending him to a model school, he could qualify for a much better school.

Mr. Speaker, the other issue is about having a primary school curriculum at the secondary school level. If the argument is correct that the cost per student is lower at the primary level—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Mr. K. Valley: —than at the secondary level, it would seem to me again that what we need are more primary schools to take into consideration those children who are not ready for secondary education. When I heard the Minister talking about model schools, I thought she had seen our experiment at Cocorite and liked the idea and that is what she was using as a model school. That is in fact a model school because we offer a curriculum with a difference. It is based on the whole concept of—*[Crosstalk]* While in fact, the schools are very good at selecting persons who are gifted academically, not all our children are so gifted and one has to understand that, and a country needs persons who are academically gifted as well as those who are gifted otherwise. I am still inviting the Minister to see the experiment at Cocorite and really develop a good model school because we really need a school with a difference to take care of those children who might be late developers and who might have gifts other than in academia.

We have had graduation upon graduation. Some of them have re-entered the secondary school system after the 14-plus and have gone on to write CXC, and some have gone on to trade schools and so forth. That is the reality. The basic point I am making is that when we approach anything, we need, especially in the area of education, to forget the politics, forget what appears to be a vote gainer and do what is right for our young people. It cannot be right to waste taxpayers' money, but we have seen it in other areas. We have seen the gift this morning of \$75 million to Maritime Life. We have to be concerned about the fact that while oil prices are now about \$30.00 per barrel, we are still having difficulties in this economy, and still not able to pay critical persons; our public servants are still existing on the 1983 wage scale while we continue to waste money. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister firstly, to consider including on the board, representation by a nominee of the local government body particularly in the electoral area, and secondly, if in fact this local school board is such a good idea, then there ought to be a condition to allow the Government some degree of control with respect to the private schools to which they would be sending students after the Common Entrance Examination. We ought to approach any matter here in a holistic manner and understand the implications throughout the system. I do not know whether my colleague from Pointe-a-Pierre, the Minister of Local Government saw this and whether he failed at Cabinet to argue for the proper representation of local government, but I think it is extremely important.

Thank you.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, his impassioned cry, his bleeding heart, all the emotion that he pumped into his contribution to the Parliament this afternoon and all that I could think about whilst he spoke, was that his conscience was so guilty that confession was good for the soul and that it was pure crocodile tears flowing from him. [*Desk thumping*] He stood here and accused this Government of deceiving and misleading the population when he is the one, throughout his contribution who attempted to deceive those who would listen to him.

In the first place he talked about registration fees and we were not giving money for chalk, duster and toilet paper and whatever. For 17 years the PNM were in office and did not increase the funding to the government schools or to the government-assisted secondary schools, despite the fact it devalued in 1983 and it devalued in 1985. Thereafter, there was the imposition of VAT at 15 per cent and it did not increase the level of funding to the denominational schools which your colleague asked you about. He talked about the lateness of the payments of the grants when for 17 years they did not give one extra cent to any government school or assisted school in this country.

Today—for the information of the Member for San Fernando West who asked through one of you about the denominational schools—over the lunch break, I presented over \$6 million worth of cheques to the assisted schools. [*Desk thumping*] Together with the Permanent Secretary, the Chief Education Officer and the Director of School Supervision, we met with the assisted-school principals and those cheques were distributed.

Secondly, over the past several months, we received representation from the Association of Principals of assisted schools and from the Association of Principals of government schools and they were to seek increased funding by way of grant funding to the secondary schools. We have been preparing a Cabinet Note which would go to Cabinet on Wednesday based on the representations of these two associations for increased levels of funding to the schools and for 17 years you did not do it and want to talk about they do not have chalk, they do not have dusters and they do not have toilet paper. Did that happen overnight in this country, when you failed and continued to fail to do anything about it?

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member talks about education being a bedrock of the society and we should not be playing games with education and in his own words he admitted that they had difficulties over the years. He talked about education and thank God for Eric Williams. I want to thank God for Eric Williams too,

because it was Dr. Eric Williams who, since 1968, called for the abolishing of the Common Entrance Examination, but you never carried out his words, you never carried out that legacy. It was this Government that abolished the Common Entrance Examination. *[Desk thumping]* When we do it and achieve universal secondary education, do you know what they are saying? *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker: Excuse me, may I appeal to the Member for Tunapuna, may I appeal to the Member for Arouca South, may I appeal to the Member for Arima. The reason I have found it necessary to get up is because I think it is nothing short of disgusting that while one Member is on her legs addressing the House on something which I am sure is serious, it is being made difficult for the reporter to report it because you are talking across to each other while she is speaking and we cannot get it. There are some people in here who want to listen and she has to listen.

Please proceed.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, I am saying that they did not achieve that universal secondary education, they did not abolish the Common Entrance Examination and when we have done it, it is said that we have done it overnight, this is an overnight effort. This Government has been in office for almost five years, and if five years is overnight, then we are very happy about that. It is this Government again that increased the chances children had to repeat that same Common Entrance Examination under the former Minister of Education, so students were given the two chances to write regardless of their age, up to the age of 13 years. That did not happen when you were there. This is my advice from the former Minister of Education.

Secondly, the number of post-primary places about which you speak were increased by the former Minister of Education to give more students a chance and thirdly, more post-primary places about which you speak were created by the former Minister of Education as well by this Government.

Miss Nicholson: That is not true, it was started by the NAR under Pantin.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: It started under the NAR and the numbers were only increased under this Government under the former Minister of Education. I am saying that now we have done it, and have been able to place all the children, the hue and cry the hon. Member is making is that we have done it overnight.

5.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, he talks about white paper. I have a copy of it here. Today he did not want to call it white paper because maybe they are so tired of telling us about

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white paper. The task force he is speaking about is the white paper of the PNM administration of 1992. White paper! All we have ever heard from the other side is white paper, more white paper and more white paper! No implementation! No action!

What did they want all of this white paper for? What did they need all of this white paper for? They did not implement it. It is not good to come and hold up white paper and task force reports one week after the next. It is no good! They need to implement what is in the white paper. Again, the hon. Prime Minister has coined the phrase in the Parliament; “they coulda, woulda, shoulda”. They were always “coulda, woulda and shouldaring”, but they could never deliver it!

While this Government has arranged to place all students in school after the Common Entrance Examination 2000, whilst the Member talked about this Government's white paper building 10 schools and 20 schools, let me make it very clear, the way in which we will be able to achieve this—and I am not sure if the hon. Member understands what we have done, because he has no idea how it could be done. I saw him on national television and they were talking about how we were overcrowding schools and stuffing children into schools, but the statistics gave the lie to that kind of argument.

Do you notice that since the results, not a single school has complained that it has been overcrowded, because not a single school is overcrowded. [*Desk thumping*] If they look at the numbers offered for registration last year and the year before and this year, they would see very clearly that not a single school has been overcrowded. I have the numbers here: Carapichaima Junior Secondary, in the year 1994, 487 students placed; in 1995, 488; in 1999, 284; and in 2000, 480.

Mr. Speaker, if we go through every one of those schools, we will see that the numbers that have been listed generally are the same as in the previous years, and in many cases, the numbers assigned to some of the schools have been reduced. So, there is no overcrowding whatsoever.

Then the issue came about overloading. We were overloading the schools! With the new schools, we have school capacity at 850, 525 and 350. If it is that in an 850 school, the maximum number of students we have placed there is 500, I do not see how that could be overloading. Why would we prefer not to put the children into the school than to have half the school empty? That is how we utilize places in the new schools and in existing schools where half the schools, and in some cases, two-thirds of the schools, were empty.

In not one of the new schools have we put students up to capacity. We used the existing schools and the new schools that are being constructed. The third thing we did was to place some students in private secondary schools.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for giving way. I wonder if she will be kind enough to tell us something about the pupil/teacher ratio and what will be the maximum number of students per class in the year 2000 as opposed to 1999 or 1998? This is in the first forms.

Miss Nicholson: Minister, you just made a case, you said that you are not overloading the schools. In a school designed for 850 students, you are putting 500. What happens in the second, third and fourth years? What does that school become, because it is over 500 you are starting with? By the next year you will be over 1,000.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: No, hon. Member. The only way it will become 1,000 is if next year we take 500 more, but that will not be the case. The form one intake in succeeding years will, therefore, obviously drop. That is important, because we will not have the same number of schools. By next year there will be more schools.

Firstly, we will be placing 500 again, so we will have a smaller form one intake, and secondly, there are more schools in which to put students. That sort of scenario down the road, of course, needs careful planning which those of us on this side, certainly when we form the next government, will continue so the schools will continue to function.

There is no overcrowding, no overloading. Before I talk about private schools, I would like to deal with the issue raised by the hon. Member for San Fernando East. He asked about pupil/teacher ratio. I want to say that the pupil/teacher ratio has, in some cases, remained the same as it was over the past five years, and in some cases, it has gone lower than what it was in the past five years. So, in all cases, we have not increased the student/teacher ratio at all. In every case, we have not increased the student/teacher ratio. In many cases we have reduced that ratio. So, I hope that answers his concern.

Existing schools, newly constructed schools. Let me talk about the new ones, because the Member talked about 10. In fact, 24 new secondary schools were established by this Government in this year for Common Entrance students in 2000. When we come to September and one, two, three or four may run overtime by a few weeks or a month, notice we will hear only about those one to four. We

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will not hear about the other 165 secondary schools at which teachers will be teaching children.

At the moment, it is about 165 secondary school centres that will be catering for students at the secondary level. There are 24 new secondary schools. How are we able to do that? We were able to do it through the cooperation and the goodwill of the denominational boards who came forward and offered space and created space in order to accommodate more students.

We thank all of these denominational boards for their contribution to the achievement of universal secondary education. The Roman Catholic Board offered a space at Point Fortin to create a convent. The ASJA offered space and is constructing four new schools, all of which will be ready for the form one intake in September. The Maha Sabha came forward with three new schools, all of which will be ready for form one intake in September of this year.

There we are with those eight schools, and all the other new secondary schools that have been created, 12 totally new constructions, most of which appear to be like small university campuses. I speak of Biche, Brazil, Manzanilla, Matura, Blanchisseuse, Coryal, Cunupia, Malabar, Debe, Waterloo, Valencia and Tableland. Twelve totally new constructions.

What we have also done is in those schools where the intake would be very small, it is better that our students are in school than out of school. It is better that they are in space that can be provided than to have the school half empty and three-quarters empty. Where else did we find space, Mr. Speaker? Because I do not think they understood. They would never have been able to do it. They took 30 years and they could never do it. They do not understand how it is we could accommodate our students comfortably.

We took the school at Beetham which has now become the Excel Composite School. We took the school at Carenage which has now become the St. Pierre Composite School, and we took the school at Malabar which has become the Malabar Composite School. The Education Act makes provision for composite schools in this country. A true composite school is a school that caters for both primary and secondary school students.

Here we had a school at Malabar built for about 850 students to begin in September with no students as yet registered at all for primary school intake. In September, given the scenario, we estimate that about 150 may come forward. Do we leave the rest of the school totally empty when these other students are left out of the school system? That would be a waste of taxpayers' money.

At Beetham and Carenage it is the same thing. The schools are relatively new. If they see the structures, they are relatively new, in good condition. Again, they were underutilized. The amount of space—the capacity of the school is far in excess of enrollment. Once again, we utilized that space to accommodate students who wrote the Common Entrance Examination 2000. This is how we were able to find the spaces. We found the spaces in existing schools, newly constructed schools and converted schools.

When we look at the placement of the students, that is only one issue. I totally agree that education cannot be about providing the desk, the chair and a classroom. It has to be far more than that. They did not understand that. That is why they can stand today and attack what we are doing in terms of the form one specials and the model school. That is the only reason.

Mr. Speaker, for years in this country—I said it in the other place—they failed to deal with students at the lower performance levels, and those were the students who went out without an education. Whilst the Member for Diego Martin Central is saying, look at some centre he has down there and he can deal with them and they could go into trade, Mr. Speaker, I want you to tell me which parent in this country will take a child who is 11 years old and say, “You are not academic material. Go take up a hammer, a shovel and a spade”.

This is the age of the Common Entrance student who may not have performed very well, and they talk about late developers. In the form one specials and in the model school, these students will be given the chance to learn. Every child can learn. [*Desk thumping*] That is what we recognize. For every child to learn, we must now provide the environment and the kind of curriculum and teaching that will allow them to learn.

When we got the literacy report which Minister Job quoted here some time before, I talked about it in the other place. The literacy report on which instructions were given not to publish that report in 1992. A study conducted between 1989 and 1992, started under the NAR government, but under the PNM government, they said not to publish it, because it showed that our students at both the primary level and secondary level, throughout the system in government schools, assisted schools and private schools were well below the international mean in reading levels.

Whilst we acknowledge and we are grateful that we had a lot of very bright students, we did not cater for those who were at a different performance level. For the time, an attempt is being made to do this, and instead of the other side seeing

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that as a way in which to assist the late developers and to assist those with disability, it is a joke to them. It is *Chicken Licken* and so forth. They better watch out, because as they talk about not a seat for them, in the next election, we will “lick them up”! All this *Chicken Licken* talk is because they fail to understand. [Desk thumping]

The Member picked up one newspaper article where a person wrote in the article and said that this *Chicken Licken* thing is not good for children to read. One! All the education officials in the Ministry of Education—is he then saying that they did not know what they were doing? Are they saying that this one person was correct and all the technical curriculum officers do not know what they are saying? Mr. Speaker, if you look at the newspaper articles, it is not only the officials in the Ministry of Education. The articles say very clearly that those are books suitable for the level.

Then they tell us that we did not test them before, but we will test them after. This, from an administration that was in government which never tested a single child in this country to determine disability, to determine if they had hearing or visual impairments! It is this Government which has started testing, screening of eyes and ears throughout the country through the Ministry of Health. [Desk thumping] They did not test any of them! It is not true! Talk to all the Regional Health Authorities. If they tested, we could count them on the fingers of our hands.

6.00 p.m.

There is a system in place now and we are going to cater for these students. We are going to do the diagnostic testing in the form one specials and in the model schools to determine those disabilities and, therefore, be able to deal with them.

They ask: How did we arrive at a list of 50 books? Well, we had Common Entrance scores. The curriculum officers looked at the scores and that is how they determined the level of reading. You can give a child *Treasure Island*—some of us read it. You cannot give *Treasure Island* to these students. They cannot read it. It is called frustration level reading. They will be frustrated; they would not even read the first word. You remember. You have forgotten when you were a child, how alliteration, repetition and the sound of words were something that was attractive. That is why you like to say the words so often. Up to now, you like to say *Chicken Licken*; you can say them five times a day everywhere you are, because it is so attractive. Especially for children, the alliteration and phonetics, those are the words and the books that the curriculum officer found.

I have acknowledged and accepted that we need more local books and, in fact, in an article headlined “A challenge to Caribbean writers” by Earl Lovelace in the *Daily Express* of Monday, August 7, 2000, on page 23, he talked about these books and:

“...expressed surprise at the news his own children’s book, *Crawfie the Crapaud*, was on the Ministry of Education’s reading list for some remedial classes...

‘I’m happy,’ he said, ‘and I hope to write more children’s books in the future’.”

Basically, there are just not enough locally written books for children and that, too, can create a challenge for our writers in the Caribbean, to produce more children’s books. To talk about the level of the books is to fail to acknowledge and fail to admit—it is to continue to hide the fact that there are students in this country who need remedial help in their maths and English and it is to continue to do what you have done all these years.

You are saying okay if we did not give all the students a place, then you would not have had to deal with students with that kind of reading level. You would not have had to deal with them and that is far from the fact and the truth. Contrary to the view that has been held that when a student wrote the Common Entrance Examination, he or she was given a place in a secondary school in this country based on whether they passed or failed the Common Entrance Examination. That is totally not so.

What determined a child going to secondary school in Trinidad and Tobago was not whether they passed or failed the Common Entrance Examination, it was whether there was a school for them to attend. What happened is they failed to get a school place. It is not that they failed the exam.

Therefore, in St. Patrick where I live, 90 per cent of the students who wrote the Common Entrance Examination went on to secondary school, but in Tobago, only 50 per cent of the children who wrote the Common Entrance Examination went on to secondary school. Now, is it that the children in St. Patrick are so much brighter than the children in Tobago? Or, is it that in other areas of the country where the transition rate is lower than the 90 per cent, that St. Patrick children are still brighter than the children in Central, the children in Arima, or the children in Diego Martin? That is not the case. In Caroni, the transition rate was 63 per cent, so, again, the St. Patrick children—90 per cent got Common Entrance

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places—were so bright that 90 out of 100 students went, whereas in Caroni, 63 per cent went and in Tobago, 50 per cent went.

The reason was that the PNM failed to provide school places for all the children who wrote. It was not because they failed or passed the Common Entrance Examination. That had nothing to do with it so to now come and say that the Government is placing students in secondary schools who do not deserve to be there, is far from the truth. That is the first point.

The second point is they placed children there who still could not read and write and who could not do mathematics, based on that transition rate of placement. They placed children in schools and failed to provide for them. That is to say, no curriculum was offered to them; nothing to give them remedial help. The true revolution, in my respectful view, in education in Trinidad and Tobago, is not just the fact that every child has got a place in a secondary school; that is not the main issue. The main issue is what is happening in terms of curriculum in the schools and in terms of the remedial teaching that is to take place in the form one specials and in the schools. For that purpose, as you know, we are looking for teachers with special remedial teaching skills to assist alongside the regular curriculum for those students.

Concerns were raised about what would happen with these form one specials. I think, again, they are missing the point. The children in the form one specials will proceed into regular form ones. The next year they will go into regular form ones. Likewise with the model schools, those who are able will move into the regular form ones. So that, it is not the end of the road for them; it is not that they are being stereotyped—he said they would be stereotyped forever as students of the model schools. Those students will be given the remediation and help they need in order to prepare them so that they can go on to the next phase of the regular form one class. Those are some of the issues with respect to the placement and the curriculum exercises.

The other issue that the hon. Member raised was when he talked about the Minister having no understanding of what is education and that he was seeking to educate me. First of all, I would like to say, thank you very much, I do not need any education from him. Secondly, this is the Government—[*Interruption*] Definitely no education from him. Thank you very much. What is very important, this is the same Opposition which was in government for all these years and there is an Act, the Education Act, Chap. 39:01, Act No. 1 of 1966. Since 1966, on our

law books, there is section 23 of the law which says that the Government would set up Committees of Management. Section 23(1) says:

“The Minister may, whenever he considers it expedient, by Order constitute Committees of Management for any Government school, consisting of such number of public officers as he considers appropriate.”

From 1966 until the former Minister of Education set up four pilot local school boards within the time of this Government, not a single committee of management had been set up and they want to talk about decentralization, empowerment of principals and so forth. Not one single committee of management was set up to assist in the running of schools and that, despite all the problems they were experiencing. They know it. In all the newspaper articles we have looked at them.

At the time when they introduced the shift system—Mr. Speaker, you know we could have done that, too, instead of placing the children in the private schools, we could have done what they did and placed them in the shift system but we recognized on this side the evils of that shift system and that is why we did not follow in their footsteps because that shift system is so fraught with difficulties. In fact, it is our vision to shift away from the shift completely and, in our schools, we will shift from the shift. We will not go backwards to shift. We have placed 1,800 students in private schools for which Government is paying. Yes, we could have placed them. We have schools—all the 24 new schools we talked about that we have created to provide spaces for Common Entrance 2000 students. We could have put them on shift.

Mr. Valley: I want to hear Morgan Job on that. What you think about this?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: But that is not our policy. We will not go back to the shift system. So, not one board of management set up by them; not one committee of management and then they want to come to educate us. They want to tell us we know nothing about education. I totally disagree with them on that.

Mr. Speaker, on the private schools, the Member expressed concerns about the private schools. He failed to admit that in this year, this is not the first year that students are being placed in private secondary schools. This has been a practice but they are of the view and the Member—I have the words and I will quote these famous words over again, because the Member for Diego Martin Central told us about placing children in schools. He talked about placing children in schools was “wasting taxpayers' money” and that it was cheaper to leave them in the primary schools. [*Interruption*] The *Hansard* is there. Placing children in schools is

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wasting taxpayers' money and that it is cheaper—so do not place them in the private schools; do not pay for them in the private schools.

Yet, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, when he first stood up, talked about the private schools and the fact that these children did not go out on the streets because there were all these existing private schools to go to. He acknowledged that the students they failed to place, their parents had to find money to pay for them to go to private schools. This Government has made the decision that not a single child should be left out of the system and that is why we will pay for them. We will pay for those students, not a single child must continue to be lost.

Mr. Speaker, apart from some comments made on the actual regulations—and we were caught up on the Government's thrust for universal secondary education—there were one or two points made, one by the hon. Member with which we can deal in committee stage, to insert a member, a local government nominee or representative, which, in my respectful view, we can deal with in committee, but I do not think I would want to have the political influence of a councillor. A councillor is a politician and I do not want him to nominate someone to sit on the local school board. I do not know but we will deal with it in committee stage. I do not agree with that. That is the first one.

Secondly, if you want to use an officer of the executive of the local government authority, again, practically, that will not work. Let us say you did not want to use a politician or the nominee of the politician, but you wanted local government involved, again, there are over 500 schools so if you want to take a local government person from actually within the council, practically, again, that cannot work.

The third reason, Mr. Speaker, is that the local school board has the authority to liaise with the local authority. It cannot be then, because I need WASA and I need T&TEC, I must get a representative from WASA and a representative of T&TEC to sit on the board and because I need books, I must get a book seller on the board. The local school board will liaise with the other authorities in the region. Again, as I say, we can discuss it in the committee stage. [*Interruption*] Okay. I am just advised that since we are on a Motion, there is no committee stage.

I am saying that I am not convinced that placing that person on the school board would have the effect that you intend and that those persons there, the ones at the moment that we propose to comprise the school board, will give us a spread of personnel from the region.

The other issue that was raised was with respect to the principal and the crossing of functions and what would be the functions of the principal. Again, perhaps I can educate the Laventille East/Morvant representative for a short while, since he attempted to educate me. As he is a lawyer as I am, I am sure he would have read Chap. 39:01 and he would have seen in that statute, the Education Act, section 27, which clearly sets out in law the functions of the principal of a school.

6.15 p.m.

For example—and I quote from section 27 of the Act:

“...Principals of schools shall be responsible for the day to day management of their school including—

(a) the supervision of the physical safety of pupils;”

You can see the difference then between the powers and duties of the proposed local school board and the functions and duties of the principal. The principal is responsible for the day-to-day management of his school, that is what the law says, including supervision of the physical safety of pupils:

“(b) the suitable application of the syllabus in conformity with the needs of the pupils of the school, and the administration of the school’s programme;”

So syllabus, curriculum and programme are for the principal.

“(c) allocation and supervision of the duties and responsibilities of members of their staff;”

Again, the administration of the running of the school on a day-to-day basis.

“(d) the discipline of the school;

(e) teaching;

(f) the proper use of school equipment and stock;

(g) the keeping of proper records;

(h) the making of financial reports through the Manager and the Supervisor to the Minister containing a statement of accounts in the form approved as well as such information as is required by the Minister;

(i) the furnishing of such returns as may be prescribed or required at any time...

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- (j) ensuring the observance of the provisions of the Act and any Regulations made thereunder in their respective schools;
- (k) co-operation with parents and with approved authorities in the execution of authorised schemes.”

Clearly, the functions of the principal are in the nature of the day-to-day running and management of the school in the teaching, supervision and the curriculum. The local school boards are in no way intended to say what the curriculum should be. They can seek to influence what the curriculum could be, but that is not part of their function in terms of teaching, disciplining and the day-to-day management of the school. They are there to assist; they are not there to replace the principal; they are not there to replace the school supervisors.

In fact, the functions and duties of the school supervisors, likewise as for principals, are set out in Chap. 39:01 of the Education Act. The functions of each set are laid out in the statute for supervisors, principals, and if we approve this measure today we would have the functions and duties of the local school boards. With respect to the Member’s point on the role of the principal I hope that answers your concern.

I think we have handled all their concerns, and so I want to state very clearly, despite the glitches that we may have, come September 2000 the Ministry of Education is working on overdrive and is committed to ensuring that every child in this country has an equal chance and the opportunity to obtain an education. The ministry and the Government are committed to the view that not a single child must be left out and every child must be given that chance to learn.

To this end, what we have been doing over the past several months is also identifying teaching staff for the schools. I am very happy to report on the new teachers for the new schools; 212 teaching positions were created. We have dealt with most of those. There are some subject areas, for example, drama, music, not so much in geography any more, physical education, where there is still a shortage of teachers nationwide, but in all the basic subjects there are teachers who have come forward.

We have also dealt with the problems in existing secondary schools, of creating more teaching positions, because there were always increases in the school population and new subjects being offered, but no increase in the establishment of the teaching staff, so the curriculum could not be properly delivered. We have created 70 new teaching positions for existing schools.

In addition, we have spent a lot of time and sent to the Teaching Service Commission the names of over 800 persons for regularization of their status. These were persons who had been acting in positions as principals, vice-principals, teacher II, or teacher I, whatever the case may be, acting in some cases for months or years. People had become professional actors, and for those we cleaned that up and sent about 800 names to the Teaching Service Commission to appoint those persons permanently. With respect to staffing we are on course.

The hon. Member talked about salaries for teachers, and I am sure that the Member knows far better than that. The Member knows that the Minister of Education, or any minister, has no jurisdiction over salary negotiations. The Member knows that, and he is now admitting that he knows, but yet he stands there and says that the Minister is not concerned about teachers' salaries. I have said and the hon. Prime Minister has also said, that teachers deserve to be paid as professionals, and that is why negotiations are ongoing. That is why there are negotiations now between the union of the teachers and the Chief Personnel Officer (CPO). The Government has not refused to take part in negotiations, those negotiations are ongoing. Based on those negotiations, teachers' salaries would be determined.

This Minister of Education or no Minister of Education, and not a single minister here has a jurisdiction, as the Member well knows, to determine levels of salary for anyone at all. So to say that I do not care about teachers' salaries, the Member is again misleading Members, if he believes that the Minister has the final say with respect to salaries.

We have gone, as I said, to clean up a number of things that have been left behind by that administration. We have dealt with the issue of placing every child for secondary education. We have dealt with the issue of remedial training, not only in the form one specials and in the model schools, but also at the primary school level we have revised and revamped the curriculum so that our children can learn to read and write.

The results of all the tests that had been done show very clearly that many of our students in the primary system leave the primary school without being able to read and write, without literacy and numeracy skills. We have revamped and changed that curriculum. Mr. Speaker, so you know what was most interesting? When we talked about abolishing the Common Entrance Examination, immediately after the last exam we had started talking about the Secondary Entrance Assessment and the way in which it differed completely from the Common Entrance Examination. That is to say, no longer would you be doing "tic

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tac toe” boxes as you did for the Common Entrance Examination. What you would now be doing is thinking, you would have to write free responses, you would have to read and write.

Mr. Speaker, when you have four choices for a question, do you know what that means? Four replies. If you write a Common Entrance Examination and you have four choices, tick one, A, B, C, D, do you know what that means? Out of four choices there is a 25 per cent chance that if you guess you would get it correct; so pure “guesstimates” were going on. When the children left, many of them could not read or write. We have changed that with the Secondary Entrance Assessment. Reading, writing, and mathematics skills would be the skills now that would be emphasized at the primary level.

When we were talking about it and I said that students now have to read and write out the answers, they do not have to tick any more, someone asked me, “Minister, there are some people who are saying that the children would now have to learn to think?” Mr. Speaker, I could not think of a more ludicrous question, that with the SEA, children now have to learn to think, and so it was such a wrong thing. One wondered what they were being taught all these years in our schools. The Secondary Entrance Assessment is clearly not the Common Entrance Examination, and it is very clear that the curriculum which is designed for that assessment would place our students better in terms of literacy and numeracy.

There is a third thing we have done and that is with respect to curriculum facilitators who have been hired on contract, who will go into the various schools where help is needed to assist the teachers to teach. So 114 positions of curriculum facilitators have been created and these persons, who are experienced teachers with very impressive qualifications, would go in now and assist the teachers to teach. In addition to the classroom teacher, the facilitators would also be there as an added aid to assist with the teaching, the development of plans and curriculum for the primary schools. We would also use some of those facilitators for the form one specials for the model schools.

Once again I want to say to the hon. Member that I thank him for his suggestions and comments, as few as they were. For the Member for Diego Martin Central there was just really one point on the local school boards; I do not see any other. I want them to know, very clearly, concerning the placing of children in schools in this country and the placing of every single child in a school in this country, that those of us on this side do not consider that to be wasting taxpayers’ money. We do not consider it at all to be a waste of taxpayers’ money;

we see it clearly as an investment in the future of the children of this nation and, therefore, an investment in the country itself.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved: That the Education (Local School Board) Regulations be approved.

COMMUNITY MEDIATION (AMDT.) BILL

Order for second reading read.

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That a bill to amend the Community Mediation Act, 1998 be read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very simple measure and it has become necessary because it was discovered that a few of the matters here had to be made in clearer terms. In particular, with respect to the Community Mediation Act, clause 3 of this Bill makes it quite clear:

“(4) Where the Court adjourns the hearing of a complaint under subsection (1), the Court shall not treat the complaint as part-heard.”

Under subsection (1) of clause 5 there is a question of the court adjourning the hearing of a complaint in order to allow time for persons to apply for mediation. The purpose of that is to ensure that it would not be said that the matter had to go back before the same magistrate.

In clause 4 instead of using the words, “determined by mediation”, if the matter is determined, that the matter shall be deemed to be dismissed. We were told that in respect of the Jamaican legislation these are the expressions which have been used, and the ministry had someone come from Jamaica and look at our Bill. In Jamaica they have been working this process and, therefore, we decided to follow the expression in the Jamaican Bill.

In respect of Part II of the Bill, it is merely elaboration on what has already been there so it does not change the substance, except that the format has changed. The reason for the change is for it to be put in the clearest possible terms as to what are the steps in the mediation for civil matters, and it was decided that it should be put in the same way as the steps for mediation in criminal matters.

I should mention though that there are two errors in words which seemed to have got in here, and at the committee stage I would give notice that in Part II,

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clause 14(5) should really be: “The Court may proceed with the hearing of the matter” and not “application”, and in clause 16(d) it should be: “the court is satisfied that the parties are amenable to mediation.” The only other change is in respect of criminal matters. Petty trespass has been included.

Mr. Speaker, the policy of this Bill has already been agreed to by the Parliament and these are merely amendments in order to tidy up some of the measures before the Bill is proclaimed into law. Therefore, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

6.30 p.m.

Clauses 1 to 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 5.

Question proposed, That clause 5 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Chairman, as I mentioned, there are two slight amendments. In 14(5) instead of “The court may proceed with the hearing of the application...” It should be:

“The Court may proceed with the hearing of the matter...”

In 16(1) (d) where it says:

“(d) the Court is satisfied that the parties are suitable for mediation.”

It should really be:

“(d) the Court is satisfied that the parties are amenable to mediation.”

Mr. Chairman: It is being pointed out to me that on page 4, we have moved from clause 5 to clause 14.

Mr. Maharaj: Clause 14 is Part II.

Mr. Chairman: The Bill has only nine clauses. So clause 5 is inclusive of Part II?

Mr. Maharaj: Yes.

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Question proposed, That clause 5 be amended by deleting the word “application” appearing in 14(5) and replacing it with the word “matter” and in 16(1) (d) deleting the words “suitable for” and replacing them with “amenable to”.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 5, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 6 to 9 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill as amended be reported to the House.

House resumed.

Bill reported, with amendment; read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to Friday, August 18, 2000 at 1.30 p.m.

I think we have done very well today and on Friday we will put just one Bill for debate because it is a very important Bill and Members may want to have sufficient time to prepare for it. It is a Bill to provide for the consolidation of the confiscation of the proceeds of drug trafficking and to provide for the confiscation of the proceeds of other crimes and the criminalizing of money laundering.

Mr. Speaker: I wish to point out that there was a matter in respect of which leave had been given to raise. Do I therefore take it that it should be deferred?

Mr. Valley: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the matter which was deferred to today was one by the Member for Diego Martin Central in which he was raising the question of the effect of the indebtedness that various companies are having on the continued viability of the National Gas Company. This will be deferred to Friday, August 18, 2000.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.38 p.m.